

## *The Sovereign, Saving Glory of Christ*

*Colossians 1:15-20*

### Discussion 1: Worship

- *What does the immediate context reveal?*

[Paul is praying ... and never really “signs off”! Our text begins with a pronoun--obviously not a standalone thought (...who’s “He”?)]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Colossians 1:11** ... May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for <sup>b</sup>all endurance and patience with joy, <sup>12</sup> giving thanks<sup>1</sup> to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[... v.3 “We always thank God ... v. 9. “we have not ceased to pray for you ... This whole meaty praise of the Preeminent Christ flows naturally out of, and is a part of a continuing prayer of thanksgiving.]

- *How does this instruct us with respect to our prayer life?*

[Praise, adoration, recognition ... of King Jesus in prayer is an important part of the believer’s prayer life... It has a heavenly ring to it too... Rev 4:8-11]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 4:8-11** And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" <sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

- *Discuss any new insights you’ve gained into the character and nature of Jesus from the exposition of this text.*

["I’ve read this for years, but it never really struck me until ..."]

### Discussion 2: Community

- *How does the preeminence of Christ affect our relationships with one another?*

[Yes--Kind of vague. Seed the conversation with v. 18 “And he is the head of the body, the church.” How many “bodies”? How many “heads”? What does it mean to be part of the *same* body? ...]

### Discussion 3: Mission

- *How does the preeminence of Christ affect our understanding of mission?*

[Yes--Also of vague. Seed the conversation with v. 19-20 "... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Note Christ's preeminence in salvation. He is a perfect Savior reconciling all things to Himself. Christ does the heavy lifting, we are instruments in His hands. It should give us great confidence and therefore boldness to proclaim the gospel "message of reconciliation" (see next).]

- *What is our role as a missional community of believers? (2 Cor. 5:17-21)*

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:17-21** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling<sup>1</sup> the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[Note the centrality of the cross in reconciliation--this is a good time to teach/review substitutionary atonement as 2 Cor 5:21 relates to Col 1:20]

#### Discussion 4: Indicatives & Imperatives

- *Do a quick review of what each is.*

*Memory aide:*

- *Indicatives--indicate what is*
- *Imperatives--"it is imperative that you do this."*

- *Discuss examples and the dangers of being "out of whack" on indicatives and imperatives.*

- *Wrong indicatives*  
[about who Christ is, what Christ accomplished... others?]
- *Rejection (or apathy) of Biblical indicatives*  
[about God's sovereignty in salvation... others?]
- *Love for Imperatives -- especially those that are not in Scripture*

[Can you think of popular man-made rules in the church culture? *Prohibitions against dancing or wine?... Do imperatives against lust and drunkenness imply such prohibitions? ... Would condemnation of gluttony imply we shouldn't eat food?*

It is very easy for preachers to get caught up in giving people what they want. *Law Lite* sells! It should be no surprise that "Think Positive and Be Nice" pop-religion sells millions of books and fills stadiums. *Leaders--if you get a chance watch an episode of Joel Osteen's TV pep-talk show and note the abundance of imperatives and lack of Biblical indicatives.*]

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### *Introduction/Review*

You don't need anything else than what you already have. Yes, you need to grow in it; it needs to bear fruit in you, but you don't need another kind of thing.

### **It is the gospel that is "bearing fruit and growing" (6)**

We grow in the Christian life by better understanding what Christ has already perfectly done for us.

False teachers were in Colossae teaching "Jesus + \_\_\_\_\_"

- Jesus + new, secret information
- Jesus + philosophy
- Jesus + Jewish legalism
- Jesus + man-made rules

In Chapter 1 Paul has been emphasizing that in Jesus there is "all power"; be fruitful in "every work" (ref. All, all, all ... every, every...). Reminds me of:

- Eph 1:3 - "He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing..."
- 2 Pet 1:3 - "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness."

### *Indicatives and Imperatives*

- Very important and something to tuck away and remember for the rest of your life and almost every time you open your Bible to understand it.
- Indicatives = *what is* (descriptions) "Ryan is out of shape"
- Imperatives = *what should be* (commands) "Ryan must get in shape."

In the Bible there are indicatives and there are imperatives. Parts that tell us what reality is already and parts that tell us what to do, what to change, how to live.

We all want imperatives. We're an enormously practical, action-oriented people today.

- Most preaching today is all about the imperatives (do this, do that, here's how, here's how I do it)
- In fact, many of the imperatives in today's preaching aren't even biblical imperatives; they're practical advice about how to do the biblical imperatives.
  - Love your wives vs. get her some flowers this week; write her a note; do a weekly date night.

- None of that is bad advice, but it's not in the Bible. Some of that practical advice can be useful - it's not always wrong - but for some of us, that's practically our Bible.

A lot of the indicatives in much of today's preaching is *not* about the Bible's indicatives, but psychological, social, cultural indicatives -- the way we are; what we tend to do; funny observations - "we're all busy today; the stock market stinks; teenagers are weird."

Today, we not only want more imperatives, we're even okay to have them without indicatives. Just tell me what to do! Tell me how to live!

We are way out of whack on all this.

- Wrong indicatives;
- don't care about biblical indicatives;
- love the imperatives ... *especially the ones that aren't in the Bible.*

And we may want the imperatives for all the wrong reasons.  
(law → accomplishment → acceptance).

What do we see in Scripture about all this?

- There are a ton of indicatives in the Bible, especially the New Testament.
- The indicatives basically always come before the imperatives.

Examples:

- Colossians - Roughly one third is indicative, one third is polemic, one third is imperative.
- Ephesians - 3 chapters of indicative; then 3 chapters of imperative (*though even 4-6 are littered with imperatives*)
  - Romans - Other than a couple short passing exceptions, the imperatives don't come until chapter 12. First there are 11 chapters of description - what is, what to believe, what we know. He'll get specific in chapter 12 - "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep," but not before teaching on sin, justification, Christ's death, new life in Christ, God's love, election.

Here's my point for Colossians 1 this morning: Here we have descriptions of who Jesus is within the context of what he did: **all indicative.**

Some of you are craving a good "to do" message about now... but Paul would tell us, **Christ is enough.**

- The imperatives of Col 3-4 are of no use with the glorious indicatives of ch 1.
- 2 Cor 3:18 - we are changed by beholding him.

- That's what we want *to do* today - to *behold Him*.
  - And by doing so to grow our faith, confidence, joy, our worship.
  - We want to afresh "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34), "to stand in awe of him" (Ps 33)

Some say this is an early hymn - Perhaps. It's certainly poetic. It is short. It is punchy. What we know for sure is that *it's some of the most densely packed theology on Jesus in all the Bible*.

There are about 10 descriptions of "who Jesus is" in verses 15-20.

### 1. **Jesus is Preeminent (19)**

- Often hear, it means that he is to "have first place in everything". But more than that...
- He is over all. Christ is all. He's not #1
- In the OT, it's "I am the Lord and there is none besides me" (not "beside me")

God's plan is for Jesus to get **glory**; for Jesus **name** to spread; for his **fame** to grow; for Jesus, his Son, to be "*all in all*" (Eph 1:23 - "filling all in all")

We've already said, that's really the theme of the whole book.

*"Jesus Christ is the Pre-eminent Lord and All-Sufficient Savior"*

### He is Eternal      *"He is the beginning" (18)*

- This **hints at Gen 1:1** - "*in the beginning, God...*" Paul says "*he (Jesus) is the beginning*"
- That's even more of a hint for any Jews reading this who were familiar with the Heb Bible (Old Testament).

### He is God

- Yes, I know it says that he's the "firstborn"-- that sounds like he wasn't eternal
- But Jesus himself claimed to be God (his friends and enemies recognized this)
- The first heresies about Jesus in the church denied his humanity, not his divinity
- It's roughly three centuries of church history before anyone really denies Jesus' divinity.

### 2. **Jesus is Preeminently the Image of God (15)**

All human beings are made in God's image (Gen 2:15)

Created in his image means that we have:

- *thinking/rationality, emotion, creativity, relationship, communication, ownership, decision making* – basically all the things that set human beings apart from the rest of creation.
- Yes “*dolphins are smarter than dogs // chimps can be more creative than rats // swans pick a mate for life // and it looks like your dog is smiling sometimes*” ...), but humans are fundamentally different. You can get an odd hint of seeming rationality or relationship or emotion in the animal kingdom, but it is universally the case in humans.
- The Bible tells us that this is a difference of degree, but of kind – *we’re made in God’s image*.

So we have this “image,” but the Fall has wrecked and marred this image – it’s like a broken mirror.

Christ is not only a non-sinful image of God; he actually is God in the flesh. He is everything he intended his people to be...and more.

**John 14:7-11** *If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”* <sup>8</sup> Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” <sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

**Hebrews 1:1-3** *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,* <sup>2</sup> *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* <sup>3</sup> *He is the **radiance of the glory of God** and the **exact imprint of his nature**...*

The old Christmas hymn *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* says “veiled in flesh, the godhead see; hail the incarnate deity.”

- Do you want to see how God loves? Look at Jesus.
- Do you want God? You go through Jesus.
- Do you want to see God? You look at Jesus.

Doesn’t this mean for us today that we go to Scripture? That’s where we see Jesus.

He’s not just an image– This divine “image” was a human being.

### **He is the firstborn (15)**

- This is a title of *honor, inheritance, and relationship* to the Father.
- Psa. 89 – “*I will appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth*”
- It’s not a chronological and literal statement that the Son of God had a beginning.

- He is God, even though he is the Father's Son – he's eternally God and eternally the Son ...just like a son isn't the same person as his father, but he's no less a human being.
- "Firstborn" means that Jesus "outranks all things"

### **In Him the fullness of God Dwelt (19)**

**Colossians 2:9** For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

- Jesus isn't one third God; he isn't one half God. He is fully God and yet he's fully man
- Trinity – one in essence, three in persons

### **3. Jesus is Preeminent in Creation (16-17)**

**He is the Creator of this World (16)** --From the smallest atom to the largest star

He's the Creator of and ultimate ruler over all *thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities* (16) ...including the *Invisible* ones

In fact, notice how he's stacking up categories, covering every conceivable base - "whether in heaven or on earth, whether visible and invisible...every throne, every authority, every ruler - He created them all." He's stacking these things up, he's repetitious, to make a point - "there's nothing, nowhere that he didn't make."

Remember from weeks past that one of the things the false teachers in Colossae promoted was a strict division between the physical and the spiritual. physical = bad // spiritual = good. No. Paul says Jesus made them both. Well, the false teachers might have replied - "okay, Jesus made the phys world, but there's a spiritual realm for which you need something more than Jesus. You need angels. You need the secret plans." No, Jesus is sovereign there too.

He is the REASON for everything (16 - "*all things created thru him and FOR HIM*")

Westminster Catechism Q.1 - *What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.*

**Romans 11:36** – for from him and to him and through him are all things.

He's not only the Creator of it all, he is involved. He's the ruler.

### **He is the sustainer (17)**

**Hebrews 1:3** ...*he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*



The universe is not self-sufficient, nor are people ...*no matter how much they want to believe that they are.*

These verses aren't just saying that Jesus "holds things together"  
They're saying, he is creation's *controlling principle; rationale; rhyme, reason; its glue and its meaning.*

- Do you live and trust like he's this sovereign?
- Do you live like everything in this world is for him? *You, your kids, your job, your toys, your plans.*

#### **4. Jesus is Preeminent in the Church (18)**

Let's start out by noticing what this verse assumes – *The necessity of the Church*

- Jesus and his church go together
- You can't have one without the other
  - *If you love me, Peter, feed my sheep*
  - *You cannot love me and not love the brothers*
  - *What you've done to the church, Saul, you did it to me – you persecuted me*

#### **He is the head of the Church**

- He is the church's Savior, it's husband, and it's Lord.
  - He protects; he keeps; he builds it; he grows it; he gifts it.
- Do you really view the church like it is Lord Jesus'?
- Do you constantly go back to the fact that he's the head? You're not; I'm not.
- How often do you ask – does Jesus really care about this thing that I'm so concerned about?

#### **5. Jesus is Preeminent in Reconciliation (20)**

We are not by nature "right with Him" – that's why reconciliation is needed

[Gospel Appeal]

Christian, here's an imperative for you: test the implied imperatives in this passage.

- We don't acknowledge well the things we talked about this morning.
- We don't glory in them well.
- We do better than we used to, praise God; but we still fall short; still filthy rags.
  - We need nothing less than the blood of the Son of God. Still.

Just as He is preeminently the divine image...

Just as He is preeminent in creation...

Just as He is preeminent in the church...

... He is to be exalted as preeminent in reconciliation

When Luther was asked "*don't you think we contribute anything to our salvation?*"

He replied, "*yes, we contribute our sin and resistance.*"

Jesus did the rest to bring us to God.