

In Him and Through Him and To Him

Colossians 1:15-20

Many reject their faith because they no longer think that Jesus can or will deliver.

They are angry at Christianity because all they see are the rules that restrain them from what they believe to be “fullness of life” here and now.

Religion to them, at best, is “smoke and mirrors”. At worst, it is human manipulation and control.

Add to this the growing complexity of the problems in this world and it is easy to wonder if Jesus really is the answer. Is faith alone in Christ alone really enough?

“Maybe, just maybe, there is something more, something else, other than Christ, that I need.” And our hearts begin to let go of our firm confidence that faith in Jesus Christ really is enough.

We are saved by grace alone... through faith alone... in Christ alone.

These are three of the 5 Solas of the Reformation.

Our passage today focuses our attention on Christ alone.

The Colossians had not rejected Christ entirely, but they had begun to doubt whether all that they hoped for in salvation could be found in Christ alone.

They were beginning to add to Christ. In truth, their view of Jesus Christ was too small.

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Jesus was great, but there were areas of life that were outside of his control. And other forces in the world could contribute to the happiness we so much crave.

What is the harm of believing in Christ “and something else” to help us on the journey to fullness of salvation?

But the Bible is clear: Our faith must be in Christ alone, not Christ plus anything else.

Typically when we talk about Christ alone, we are denying any trust in our own good works to save us.

It is the finished work of Jesus Christ alone that saves us. His righteousness and not ours.

But in this passage Paul focuses more on the Person of Christ, who He is in his nature.

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we are believing in both His person and His work.

They cannot be separated from one another.

But for the sake of instruction, Paul can focus our attention on one or the other. And that is what he does here in Colossians 1. He focuses on the person of Jesus Christ, who He is.

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Paul wants to increase the Colossians' understanding of who Christ is. The purpose is so that they will have a greater confidence that faith alone in Christ alone is enough.

In these verses we find some of the most exalted theology of Jesus Christ in all the Bible.

All things are in him, and through him, and to him.

I will begin reading in v. 13.

Read Colossians 1:13-20.

You have in your bulletin a copy of the passage.

It is my translation.

And I have indented the text and emboldened some words to help you see the structure of the passage.

Notice the bold face type: **In him, through him, and to him** - which occurs twice in the passage.

This is not the only place in Scripture that we find this language. Paul loves to use the phrase "in Him" or "in Christ" throughout his letters.

But you may recall the Doxology at the end of Romans 11 as well.

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“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.”

If you are going to continue believing in “Christ alone,” then you must grow in your understanding that “in him and through him and to him are all things.”

15 He is

the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.

Paul begins by saying that the beloved Son in whom they believe is the “image of the invisible God.”

Adam was created “in the image of God”. Is Paul saying that Jesus is a man, like other men?

Combined with the rest of the passage, it is clear that Paul means more, much more by this statement.

The beloved Son of God “is” the image of God, the original on whom Adam and Eve were designed.

The only begotten Son, eternally existing as the 2nd Person of the Trinity, and Himself fully divine, is the image after which Adam was created.

Man is made “in the image of God”.

The Son of God “is” the image of God from which Adam is created.

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What does this mean for us?

If you desire to know God, only Jesus Christ can reveal Him to you.

In Jesus Christ, you do not have “some” of God. You do not have something “close” to God.

In Jesus Christ, you have God.

When you begin to wonder if coming to Church is worth all the effort... when you doubt if reading and studying the Bible is worth the time and energy... remember this, “The Word of God and the Preaching of God, are the primary means by which we know Jesus in this life. And all our hopes rest in knowing Christ alone.

Paul immediately couples this with the statement that He is the “firstborn of all creation.”

Understanding firstborn can be confusing.

When we hear “firstborn”, we naturally think of a couple bearing their first child.

This makes us question whether the Son of God was born like a baby is born.

But Paul is not here talking about Jesus being born as a baby.

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He is talking about the eternal divine nature of the Son.
There was never a time when the 2nd person of the Trinity did not exist as the Son of God.
So, firstborn here does not refer to a literal birth of the Son.

The Son of God is NOT “of” the creation, meaning “a part of the creation”. He is not himself created.

CSB/NIV - the firstborn over all creation;

That being said, human firstborn sons are used by God to help us understand the idea of the firstborn.
Listen to how Jacob speaks about his firstborn in the book of Genesis.

Genesis 49:3 ³ "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

Preeminent in dignity
Preeminent in power

This is what we should think when we hear that Jesus is “firstborn over all creation.”

He is the One who is Surpassing all others.
He is unequalled, in both dignity and power.
Preeminence is the right term.

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Whatever amazes you in this world, owes its awesomeness to Jesus Christ.

And, its awesomeness does not equal the awesomeness of Jesus Christ. He surpasses everything else in awesomeness.

This brings us to the heart of Paul's argument.

16 For by (evn) him all things were created,
 in heaven and on earth,
 visible and invisible,
 whether thrones
 or dominions
 or rulers
 or authorities-
 all things were created
 through(diV) him
 and
 for (eivj)him.

ESV translates "by him... through him... for him..."

More closely to the Greek = "in him... through him... to him..."

Prepositions are difficult to translate because they have a wide range of meaning depending upon their context.

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1. In = can mean by His hand; but it can also mean originating in His person; either spatially or logically.
 - a. A human child comes forth from the parents.
 - b. In some mysterious sense, the child was “in the parents”.
 - c. The creation comes forth from God. The creation is NOT God. But it finds its very existence, its origin, in God, in Christ.
 - d. Before an artist puts colors on a canvas, the painting must first exist in Him.
 - e. Before the creation burst forth in time, it lived in the heart of the Creator.
2. Through = by His hand
 - a. Christ is the means through which the creation burst forth.
 - b. Jesus is the Word of God. God spoke the creation into existence.
 - c. The Son was active in the process of creation. It is He who has the power over the creation.
 - d. There is not any other power that combined with that of Christ to make the world in which we live. It was Christ alone through whom the world was made.
3. To = for His glory; for His enjoyment; being presented to Him
 - a. The Father intended the creation as a gift for His Son.
 - b. The purpose of the creation is to be presented to the Son.

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- c. And since the creation is both in and through the Son, the creation brings glory to the Son.

This is why the first question of the Shorter Catechism ask?

What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

We might be even more specific, to glorify Jesus Christ and enjoy Him forever.

Have you ever created something "for yourself"?

It might be something so simple as a good meal. Or maybe you designed a new home exactly as you wanted it.

Whatever it is, you create it with your desires in mind.

It is your specific tastes and interests that go into the building of the meal or the home. And it is your skill that goes into crafting the final product. In the end, it is your enjoyment of the home or the meal that matters.

The entire cosmos is a meal for Christ... a home for Him to enjoy.

And you have a place in His design.

The entire created order finds its existence in Christ.

The creation originates in Christ.

The creation comes into existence through the activity of Christ.

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And finally, the purpose of the created order is to be presented to Christ.

Taken together “in him and through him and to him” might mean more than any one by itself.

Jesus the source of all things, Jesus is the sustainer of all things, and all things exist to find their meaning and purpose in being brought to Jesus.

I hope that as you think of Christ, these prepositions will be stuck in your mind: “in him, and through him, and to him.”

... are all things.

The entire universe finds its existence in the Son of God.

“In heaven and on earth” is what is called a merism. It is like saying A to Z and everything in between.

The entire physical universe including outerspace belongs to God.

Abraham Kuyper is famously quoted as saying, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” But Paul means even more than the physical universe.

“Visible and invisible”

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The world in which you see with your eyes is only some of what Christ has created. He has also created a spiritual cosmos, existing alongside the physical cosmos.

This spiritual world includes the very throne of God. It also includes the spiritual world of angels and demons.

Just as the physical world has kingdoms and rulers, so this spiritual world also has “thrones and dominions and rulers and authorities.”

Thrones and dominions refer to the places and positions of power, both in the physical world and in the spiritual realms. Rulers and authorities refer to people and angels (fallen and unfallen).

These spiritual realms do not exist for your curiosity. Paul’s purpose is not so much to open his readers up to this unseen world, as it is to declare the supremacy of Christ over both the physical and spiritual realms.

Anything, seen or unseen, exists in Christ and through Christ and to Jesus Christ.

Even though Christ is not the author of evil, even that which is evil in the world must be included in “the all things.”

Physical forces of nature, helpful and harmful.

A soft rain that replenishes the soil and the hurricane that devastates the land.

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Good health and poor health.

Genetic defects

Mental disorders

Diseases; cancer, arthritis, dementia

Aging

Cultural forces; popular trends

Societal influences; social media

Peers

Political forces

Government leaders

Judges

Spiritual forces – Good angels and demonic powers

Any power or authority in all the Universe exists in and through and to Jesus Christ.

In Him and through Him and To Him are all things.

When you begin to understand this, you begin to see why our faith must be in Christ alone.

So far, Paul has been discussing the beloved Son's relationship to the Creation.

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In vv. 19-20 Paul will explain the Son's relationship to the New Creation.

Vv. 17-18 link together vv. 15-16 with vv. 19-20.

17 And
 he is
 before all things,
 and
 in him all things hold together.

That Christ is "before all things" makes clear that the Son of God existed "prior to" the entire created cosmos. The Christ is uncreated.

The One who existed before the creation, takes on created flesh and enters into His creation.

But in taking on humanity, the Christ does not cease to be God.

"in him all things hold together."

The basic idea is that everything that exists continues to exist "in the Son".

The stability of the natural laws of the universe depend upon the Son upholding them.

You might picture Atlas holding up the globe of the earth. Only Jesus upholds the entire universe both seen and unseen.

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“Without him, electrons would not continue to circle nuclei, gravity would cease to work, the planets would not stay in their orbits.” Dunn, 126.

I would add, the angelic realm would also collapse and no longer exist.

Demons depend upon Christ at every moment for their very existence. Ponder that as you wrestle against these forces of evil in your daily struggle against sin.

All things hold together “in Christ.”

This is even true of the current creation that exists in rebellion to Christ.

All Jesus would have to do is cease holding and the universe would no longer exist.

The Son of God really is amazing.

His position over the creation cannot be overstated.

But this present creation has been corrupted.

It doesn't look like our good God is controlling all things.

The world looks like it is spinning out of control.

Paul does not go into this here. He explains it more in Romans 8.

Instead, Paul draws a parallel between Christ's position over the original creation, with his position over the New Creation.

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What is true of the Son in this current creation, is equally true in the New Creation.

The New Creation is God's work of restoring the Old Creation, of bringing the Old Creation to its true fulfillment and purpose in Christ.

The New Creation is the Old Creation without all the effects of the curse.

There is no death in the New Creation. There is no dying. There is no disease. There is no wasting away of any kind. And there is no evil.

If Christ's position over the New Creation was in any way less than His position in the original creation, then we would be justified to no longer trust in Christ alone.

But Paul is emphatic, Jesus holds the same position of preeminence over the New Creation.

How does Paul know this?

Because the New Creation began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

When Jesus received His resurrection body, the New Creation began.

Not until Jesus returns on the clouds and all who are in him receive their resurrection bodies will the New Creation come in

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its fulness, but it began when Jesus rose up from the grave 2,000 years ago.

Just as the old creation is “in him and through him and to him” so the new creation is also “in him and through him and to him.”

The Son holds the same exalted position in the New Creation as he does in the First Creation. Only now, he does so in human flesh and blood.

18 And
 he is
 the head of the body, the church.
 He is the beginning,
 the firstborn from the dead,
 that in everything he might be preeminent.

The Church exists in the Old Creation, but itself belongs to the New Creation.

The Church is the fruit of the Son’s work as a human.

Paul gives the metaphor of a human body to express this.
Jesus is the head of the body.
He is the source of the body’s existence.
And He exists over the body as its Ruler.

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Paul tells us that the reason for this is so that in all things, He might be preeminent.

prwteu,w be first, have first place, hold highest rank or *dignity*

Just as the Son is preeminent over the old creation, so He is preeminent over His church, the firstfruits of the New Creation.

The work of the Son that brings the Church into existence is nothing less than the life, and death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He is the “firstborn from the dead”.

And this is a parallel of his being firstborn over the original creation.

The Church existed “in Christ” even before she existed in time and space.

The Church exists “through Christ”. It is through His working that individuals are born again and the Church is constructed. And the Church will be presented “to Christ” as His beloved bride.

The Church finds its existence “in him... and through him... and to him.”

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19 For **in him** all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

The fullness of God has always “dwelt” in the 2nd Person of the Trinity.

The mystery is that this fullness now dwells in “humanity” – in Jesus Christ.

And the Church finds their existence “in the One in whom the fullness of deity was pleased to dwell.”

The Church is the Temple of God.

The Church is the body of Christ.

The fullness of God is found in Christ.

And Christ exists as the head of the Church, His body.

20 and

through him to reconcile

to himself

all things,

whether on earth or in heaven,

making peace by the blood of his cross.

The Church is the body of Christ. The members of the Church are the subjects of Christ’s eternal kingdom. But the kingdom is more than people.

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Jesus will rule over “all things” in the New Creation, whether on earth or in heaven.

The entire created order will finally achieve its original purpose.

The blood of the cross is the means by which the curse is lifted from the entire creation.

The result is that Jesus will be preeminent over the New Creation.

The Church exists in Christ.

The Church exists through Christ.

The Church exists to be presented to Christ.

In Christ alone we find our life as believers.

There is no one else of which we can say, “in him and through him and to him are all things, in this creation, and in the new creation.”

Studying this has not magically transported me into a new level of spiritual existence. But what it has done has given me greater resolve to persevere in the faith.

There is nothing else out there that has not yet been discovered that holds the key to life and happiness.

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I have nothing against the exploration of space. I must admit that its vastness intrigues me. But there is not some hidden clue on the dark side of some distant star that holds the key to life.

Keith Green once wrote, “You can run to the end of the highway and not find what your looking for.”

Jesus really is the way the truth and the life.

This passage forces me to see Christ as more.

And I want him to be more “in my thoughts and attitudes”.

This passage has made me feel shame.

I far too often live as if Jesus requires my devotion, but it not really worthy of my devotion.

I know that I need to submit my will to His, but in my heart I think that somehow I am going to lose something if I do.

And I think that because the world is not as I think it should be, that Christ is no longer working all things for our good and His glory.

I find that I am not living by faith alone in the One “in whom and through whom and to whom are all things.”

But even though I feel my shame, this passage also propels me to greater faith and peace.

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The Church is not a self-propelled ship.

The Church does not exist or flourish without Christ.

As members of the Church, we are to strive to build up the Church.

But in the end, it is in Christ that the Church finds its existence.

We can trim the sails. We can lift the anchor. We can steer the ship in the desired direction.

But unless the wind blows, the ship will not move.

This is not comfortable for me. I want control. I want to make it happen.

But only God can bring about new life in your heart.

Only Jesus Christ can hold the Church together.

Only Jesus can present the Church to himself on that final day.

In the end, it really is all about Jesus.

In him and through him and to him are all things.

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... his beloved Son...

15 who is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation,

because

in him was created

all things

16 in the heavens and upon the earth,
things visible and things invisible,
whether thrones
whether dominions
whether rulers
whether authorities.

All things

through him

and

to him

have been created;

and

17 he is before
all things
and
all things

in him

hold together

and

18 he is the head
of the body

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of the Church;
he is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead,
in order that he might be in all things
preeminent,
because
in him was pleased to dwell all the fullness
19 and
20 **through him** to reconcile
all things
to himself,
after making peace
through the blood of his cross,
whether things upon the earth
or
whether things in the heavens.