

“Divine Cohesion”
Colossians 1:17
(Preached at Trinity, February 11, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 1 of Colossians** keeps taking us higher and higher. In **Verse 16** we read that the Lord Jesus Christ is the cause of all things. All things find their existence in Him.
Colossians 1:16 NAU - "all things have been created through Him and for Him."
John wrote in his Gospel:
John 1:3 NAU - "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."
 - a. It is beyond the capacity of our mind to comprehend a being that had no beginning and whose existence is in Himself.
 - b. It is beyond the capacity of our mind to comprehend a being that existed in the infinite realm of eternity before anything but Him existed. It was a realm of nothingness surrounded by infinite fullness. This is our God.
 - c. Then, it is beyond the capacity of our mind to comprehend that according to His infinite wisdom and pleasure and infinite power, He caused all that exists to come into existence.
2. Now in **Verse 17** Paul says more. Not only did Jesus exist before creation and is the source of creation, He is also the sustainer of creation.
3. Paul makes two claims in **Verse 17**
 - A. First, Paul says of Christ that He existed before anything was.
 - a. Paul uses the word **πρό** - Of time it speaks describes coming before.
Ephesians 1:4 NAU - "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."
 - b. Once again, Paul is affirming the eternity of Christ. Jesus Christ is from everlasting to everlasting. As the second person of the Godhead He has no beginning. He is self-existent. This annihilated the claim of the Gnostics that Jesus was a created being.
 - B. Second, Jesus is the sustainer of all things.
συνέστηκεν, verb indicative perfect active 3rd person singular from **συνίστημι** - Literally it means "stand with" or "stand together."
Paul is using it to describe the sovereign dominion of Christ in sustaining creation. Most translations translate it, "in Him all things hold together."
The perfect tense makes it a continuous activity – Jesus continues to hold all things together.
4. Not only did Jesus exist before creation and is the source of creation, He is also the sustainer of creation. This morning I want us to consider this wonderful thought. That Jesus Christ is the One through whom all things continue.

- I. Jesus is the sustainer of the physical universe
- A. Creation can only continue exist by the active dominion of Christ.
Hebrews 1:3 NAU - "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,"
1. Jesus is the glue that holds all things together.
 2. All matter is comprised of the realm of the microscopic. Each atom is a mass of whirling protons and electrons. What holds the atom together? No one knows for sure. Paul says it is Christ who holds all things together.
 3. In other words, without the constant, sustaining power of Christ the universe would fly apart. All would disintegrate.
- B. Jesus sovereignly governs all of creation
1. The Deists believed that God created the world and then removed Himself from any involvement allowing creation to follow its natural course. They saw God as a great clockmaker who started the hands of time ticking and is now allowing creation to unwind without any further involvement. Paul is saying that not only is Christ active in creation, creation can only continue exist by the active involvement of Christ.
 2. From the outward appearance things seem chaotic. In reality, everything is in perfect order. There isn't a molecule out of place. Everything is in harmony, everything fulfilling its function. Nothing is occurring by chance or fate but all things working perfectly according to the sovereign hand of Christ.
 3. We can see the detail all around us. The total eclipse was possible because of the perfect size of the moon, its perfect distance from the sun, its perfect orbit around the earth.
 4. Nothing happens outside God's sovereign control
Daniel 4:35 NAU - "And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, "What hast Thou done?"
 5. Few understand just how fragile life upon the earth is; how absolutely dependent we are upon God's sustaining grace. Paul is saying that our survival is due to the fact that Christ is holding all things together.
 - a. All the conditions must be maintained perfectly for life to exist upon our tiny planet. Christ maintains those conditions – "In Him all things hold together."
 - b. Our earth has to maintain a perfect rotation. The angle of tilt has to be right. It has to keep a perfect distance from the sun.
 - c. A perfect balance of gasses must be maintained in our atmosphere in order for us to live – oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide

- d. The water cycle of evaporation and precipitation must be in perfect balance.
 About 10% of the earth's fresh water is held in the atmosphere.
 The rivers have flowed into the sea for thousands of years, yet sea level remains fairly constant.
 If the polar ice cap melted the seas would rise by 230 feet
 This is by the power of Christ.
Job 38:8-11 NAU - "Or *who* enclosed the sea with doors
 When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb; ⁹ When I made a cloud its garment And thick darkness its swaddling band, ¹⁰ And I placed boundaries on it And set a bolt and doors, ¹¹ And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther; And here shall your proud waves stop "
- e. Harvests must consistently brought in year after year. Scientists say if we missed one harvest there would be shortages. If we missed two we would have a severe need – prices would skyrocket. If we missed the third harvest we would be in serious need and hunger would ensue.

II. Jesus is the sustainer of our mortal life

A. Life is a mystery

1. The precise definition of life has always baffled the medical world.
 - a. When does life begin? This causes great consternation for the sinful abortion advocates who deny the existence of life until the mother declares it.
 - b. When does life end? This too has often proved a difficulty for the medical community.
 Is it when our heart stops? Is it when our brain ceases to function?
 - c. Paul gives us the answer to life: Christ!
2. In **Verse 16** Paul declares Christ to be the source of life
 - a. He is the master of procreation. The Bible recognizes life within our mother's womb
Jeremiah 1:5 NAU - "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."
Jeremiah 20:17 NAU - "Because he did not kill me before birth, So that my mother would have been my grave,"
 - c. Life begins at conception – cellular division and growth begins, the brain forms and begins to function. At the appointed time the heart begins to beat. As development continues, awareness begins.
 This is the mysterious work of Christ.

B. What is it that keeps us alive?

1. We know there are the basic necessities of life – food, water, air
2. But what is it that makes us alive and keeps us alive?
Paul is saying the Jesus Christ is the sustainer of all things?
3. If Christ suspends His divine hand in sustaining us we all die.
Acts 17:28 NAU - "for in Him we live and move and exist"
4. John Davenant – “Every creature, whether earthly or heavenly, visible or invisible, would sink back again into its former nothingness, if the Divine preservation were withdrawn.”¹
5. The truth is, our life is tremendously fragile. It depends upon the sustaining hand of Christ. He could release His hold upon our life at any moment.
6. Jonathan Edwards preached his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” from Deut. 32
Deuteronomy 32:35 NAU - "Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them."
He states the great danger if God lets us go:
“That the reason why they are not fallen already and do not fall now is only that God’s appointed time is not come. For it is said, that when that due time, or appointed time comes, their foot shall slide. Then they shall be left to fall, as they are inclined by their own weight. God will not hold them up in these slippery places any longer, but will let them go; and then, at that very instant, they shall fall into destruction; as he that stands on such slippery declining ground, on the edge of a pit, he cannot stand alone, when he is let go he immediately falls and is lost.

You probably are not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of hell, but do not see the hand of God in it; but look at other things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw his hand, they would avail no more to keep you from falling, than the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it.

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider’s web would have to stop a falling rock.”

¹ Davenant, John, *Colossians, Geneva Series of Commentaries*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009) page 203.

III. Jesus is the sustainer of our soul

A. Salvation is in Christ alone

1. This is the heart of Paul's words in **Verse 14**
Colossians 1:13-14 NAU - "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."
2. Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer. The Gospel is Christ
Acts 4:12 NAU - "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
1 Corinthians 1:30 NAU - "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption"

B. If you are a Christian no power in this universe will be able to separate you from Him - "in Him all things hold together."

1. His sustaining grace is declared over and over
Romans 8:35 NAU - "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"
John 10:27-30 NAU - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ "I and the Father are one."
2. Herman Witsius (Dutch Reformed Theologian of the 17th Century) –
"Those to whom God has freely given faith and holiness, he likewise keeps with such solicitous care, that it is impossible for any true believer totally and finally to fall away from that holiness when once it is begun, and thereby forfeit the salvation appointed for him."²

Conclusion:

1. Do you recognize the infinite dominion of Christ?
Most people today tend to localize Christ. They put Him in a manger 2000 years ago. Or they confine Him to the church and religion. Or they place Him in heaven where He will remain until His return.
2. Paul is saying here that Jesus is at the heart of our existence. His active presence is essential for our survival. Even more than this, His active presence is our hope of eternity. The Christian life is a relationship with the living God who is imminently near.
3. Why did God create the universe? He did it to display Christ.
Romans 11:36 KJV - "For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen."
4. Are you trusting Him? Are you resting in Him?

² Witsius, Herman, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man – Vol.2*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012) page 294.