

The Supremacy of Christ Over All

Colossians 1:15-17

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, June 21, 2020

Please turn in your Bibles or turn on your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1. I can't tell you how glad I am to be with you, to sing with you, to see you as the gathered church, and to preach to you the glorious Christ as His body. I love that we're here outside in creation because our next text in Colossians is all about **Christ's glory in creation**. The heavens declare His glory and His handiwork shouts in the sky the supremacy of Christ. Up there that blazing sun was created by the preeminent Son of God. He's to be the blazing center of our life, the holy dazzling massive reality all else should revolve around.

The centrality of Christ needs to eclipse and burn away everything else

Jesus made big oak trees and little blades of grass, specks of dirt and birds, and He sustains old and young, big guys like Shawn or little ones here, or in the womb (there's several here being fearfully and wonderfully made). He's got the whole world in His hand, including the little bitty baby. Jesus made everything in nature we can see or can't see, including the air we breathe. In this beautiful creation we're to see the preeminence of Christ as Creator and beautiful Savior. The theme of Colossians is the supremacy of Christ and 1:15-18 are **the book's key verses**. It's also the point of the whole universe.

Look up from this world's headlines to Jesus who made and is head over all

Colossians 1: ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* ¹⁶ *For by 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 him and for him.* ¹⁷ *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* 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 [ESV, NIV 'so that in everything he might have the supremacy']*

PTL for the body, our local church in 1 service! 1st time altogether since 3/8

It's essential we gather together as a church body under our supreme Head. Let's focus on v. 15-17 and how Christ's supremacy has to be the focus of everything. This leads into chap 3: we need to keep seeking or setting minds on what's above, not what's going on here on earth. Our affections need to be focused on where Christ is, and who He is as first in our heart. How easy it is to let the news or our different views of this crisis distract us from who Christ is. As we see the chaos in cities across America, civil authorities fail or society itself falling apart, we need to remember Jesus is on His throne, with sovereign authority, design and order as He holds all things together. In these times, nothing is more timely than seeing and seeking Christ above all.

What are you focused on or fixated on apart from Christ?

Ps 34 says magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together. O taste and see the Lord is good. O see and savor the supremacy of the Lord Jesus.

**Outline: 1. See Christ's Deity as Creator over all (v. 15-16)
2. Savor Christ's Sovereignty as Sustainer of all (v. 17-18)**

Look in context at **2:9** *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...*

In Jesus is the fullness of God and fully man, 100% humanity, 100% deity.

We start with Christ's deity, which just means Christ is divine, Jesus is God.

The context, end of **1:13** *'the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God...'*

The *He* in v. 15-17 is the beloved Son, King Jesus. He's God's very image, that means He's **the visible revelation or manifestation of God we otherwise can't see**, like we sing 'Immortal, invisible God only wise...hid from eyes.'

But Jesus shows us God as His image, as **God manifested in the flesh**. John 1 says in the beginning the Word was with God and the Word was God and *'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory...'* 1:18 *'No one has ever seen God [the Father]; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.'* As the image of the invisible God, as God in the flesh, Jesus makes known and makes visible the Father. We can taste and see that the Lord is good through Christ's person and work

Our kids learned in the catechism 'God is a Spirit and has not a body like men...Can you see God? No I cannot see God but He always sees me.' God told Moses *'no man can see me and live,'*¹ but God's Son became flesh and took on a body like men so we could see a mirror image of the invisible God

Later in John's gospel in the upper room Philip asks 'show us the Father.'

'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"?' (John 14:9). That's what Jesus was doing and still does.

We see the glory of God in the face of Christ, as God's image (2 Cor 4:4, 6).

Keep reading in Col 1:15 Paul adds He's *'the firstborn of all creation.'* That isn't talking about the physical birth of Jesus 4000 years after creation. Cain was the firstborn to Adam and Eve after creation, but this is before creation and the source of creation. If you keep reading, the next verse says all things were created by Him, so this can't mean He's the first created thing or being

NKJV has 'firstborn over all creation,' He's over it, not part of it

The idea of "first-created" would be a different Greek word *proto-ktisis*, but Paul uses the Greek word **proto-tokos**, for firstborn in the sense of **first place or preeminent one over all**. This word emphasizes priority and superiority.²

In Paul's cultural background if you heard *firstborn* you'd think the heir, the special beloved Son with a supreme place in the Father's heart. God's Son is the heir of the universe, superior to creation and supreme over it. 'Firstborn' was a title of Messiah in

Ps 89:27: *I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.*³
Jesus fulfills that title as most exalted

Look at Col 1:16: *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth...* Christ's deity as Creator in this text is a part of the **testimony of a member of our church**. This is a life-changing passage. He gave permission to share with you how this passage changed his life to help illustrate that:

'We had our first child and were seriously looking for a church where we could raise our children. We respected the Bible as God's Word even though we were unbelievers, but mistakenly thought most Christians were "hypocrites". So we were easily convinced by a visiting Jehovah's Witness couple that we could learn the Bible from them in our own home. So began our weekly Bible study using their New World [Mis]Translation

...As the weekly Bible study progressed, we both knew just enough Bible truth to grow increasingly puzzled and later distressed by obvious contradictions in their blue study guide, The Book That Leads to Eternal Life. Each week we marked up every page with copious critiques and cross-references. We were particularly puzzled with passages where their JW Mis-translation added seemingly spurious extra words that reversed the meaning. In John 1:1 they add "a" to change Jesus from God to "a god".

I believe the turning point was when I asked our JW Bible-study leader why Colossians 1:15-20 in their Bible directly conflicted with John 1:3, which states "*All things came into existence through him*", whereas Colossians 1 inserts the word "other" 5 times, thus implying falsely that He Himself was previously created [rather than the Creator of "all things"]:

- v.16a "*because by means of him all [other] things were created...*
- v.16b *All [other] things have been created through him and for him.*
- v.17a *Also, he is before all [other] things,*
- v.17b *and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist...*

In the 1970 version of the JW Mis-translation we were using, they inserted brackets around "other" indicating clearly that it was an inserted word not in the original; but I notice now in the online updated version that the brackets are removed with no explanation. Finally, when the JW couple saw they were not getting anywhere, the husband suggested they had a JW friend living next-door to their home, who had more grasp of the translation issues so he could better answer my questions... I knew a little Greek from my college fraternity days and knew the New Testament was written in Greek, so I hoped this friend could explain...contradictory renderings... He told me happily: "I have a NWT Greek-Interlinear New Testament which I'll give you so you can see for yourself!" Our Bible study leader looked distressed and tried to stop him, but he went too quickly and brought it to me.

I recall I then opened the Greek-Interlinear to Rom 10 and pointed out the obvious conflict: v.9 "*For if you publicly declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord...you will be saved.*" v.13 *For "everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah*

will be saved.” I asked: “Both words are the same in the Greek, so why isn’t verse 9 translated “declare with your mouth that Jesus is Jehovah...you will be saved”? They were both visibly shaken, and my hope is the one who gave me the Greek-Interlinear may have eventually obeyed what that verse says [confessed Jesus is Jehovah, Lord, Creator and Savior].

A few days later the Lord had sufficiently humbled me to fall on my knees, repent of my sins of doubting and disobedience, and cried out: “Lord Jesus, I now know You are Jehovah! And the Father has raised You from the grave so You can save me!” And He did! And my wife followed soon after it became more clear to us both. Thank You Lord Jesus! God can save even through careful study of a mistranslation.’

That’s my dad’s testimony! Thank you Lord Jesus for saving my dad, changing him from an evolution teacher to someone who teaches how creation is about Christ’s exaltation.

And He can save you if you humbly bow, repent of your sin, and trust Jesus alone and what He did for your sin in dying and rising for your life. Your Creator can be your Savior if you confess like Thomas that He is your Lord and your God. He needs to be supreme in your life, this is all that He might have the supremacy in everything. Jesus Christ must be #1 in your life. All things are not only from Him and made through Him, it says it’s all for Him

Heb 1 is the best commentary on Col 1, it says Jesus is *‘heir of all things... he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word... as much superior to the angels...when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” ... about the Son [God] says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever...”* God calls His Son *God!*

The radiance of the Father, before the dawn of time, He spoke, all creation came to be The molecules and planets Reveal His great design, every one was made so we could see

You are the glorious Christ The greatest of all delights [See and savor His supremacy!]

- 1. See Christ’s Deity as Creator over all**
- 2. Savor Christ’s Sovereignty as Sustainer of all**

v. 16 includes in all things *‘... visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were made through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Our exalted enthroned ruler has all authority, His dominion is forever, and He holds all things together, even when we can’t (and our society sure can’t)!

- We need to remember this in our world fearing an invisible virus
- As our government can’t hold things together, and we can’t either

- In our nation challenging constitutional authorities and civil rulers
- In our cities where anarchy has taken dominion of whole city blocks
- In our own eyes we see visible racism, rioting, rights being set aside
- In some church families, relatives have disowned over movements
- In our own church I've seen a rising resentment towards our leaders

This verse is looking higher than politics and what we see in the world, it's talking about the unseen spiritual world Christ created. If you're struggling with restrictions from government or struggling with what fellow Christians are doing or not doing in the church or the world, or struggling relationally, if you struggle with just being bothered and are bitter about recent events...

Paul says in Ephesians '*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil...*' We're in spiritual warfare. Those are the terms in v. 16, angels God created, some who rebelled and fell with Satan, good or fallen angels, demons (end of v. 13 *domain of darkness*)

We're in a spiritual battle, not just away from church, esp. as we come back

If you struggle as we regather, whether with the Governor or just grumbling in your heart about rules, you need to remember the fallen angel rulers who want you to focus on your complaints instead of your Christ. Satan doesn't like the church gathering united and he'll do anything to keep us divided or just distracted from what really matters (our supreme and sovereign Christ).

Preferences, protestors, political leaders divide; the preeminence of Christ unites

We need to be strong in the Lord, in the strength of His might, His armor. We need to stand together as soldiers united against a real invisible enemy, shield-to-shield, linked as soldiers, as a band of brothers and sisters, no one left behind. Some can't be on the front lines now for medical reasons, but others are wounded and need help to be brought back. Others need us to get down in the trenches with them, but what we can't do is start shooting each other or breaking rank and joining insubordination like the rest of the world. We need the gospel of peace to gird our feet, a helmet of salvation guarding our minds in who we are in Christ, the sword of scripture to cut through lies.

The shield of faith we take up together against flaming darts of the evil one

- Being apart in this crisis has unique temptations to easily enflame us
- Fear or anxiousness can flare up, frustration or anger quickly ignites
- Other "arrows" like addictive habits make us a target when isolated
- Stress or strife in family tempts us to turn fiery darts on our beloved
- Discouraged and drained leaders can feel the pain of being shot at
- Judging brothers about COVID responses (too cautious/too reckless)
- Darts of the evil one can be tranquilizers, deadening apathy, laziness
- Or poisonous dart like bitterness, unforgiveness or self-centeredness
- Our enemy is a master archer and we're sitting ducks if we're alone
- We need to be with the flock, talking face to face, praising together

I've felt weak, more misjudging, misunderstanding. We'll all struggle with flesh and blood after missing 3 months of church in regular means of grace, staying away or aloof is dangerous. Our real enemy tempts us to see people as enemies. We need to talk to each other, not about each other, assume the best till we do. The assembly in Heb 10 is where we stir love and encourage others. Without the normal means of grace so long, let's give others much grace together. Make much of Jesus, magnify with me, let's exalt together.

Flesh and blood politicians aren't the struggle; the world, the flesh, the devil are wrestling against us and we need to wrestle in prayer and tap in a friend. We need to look past even our spiritual enemies in v. 16 to the supremacy of Christ who is over all in v. 18. It says He's head of the body, the church He promised to build that the gates of hell will not prevail against. He is before all things, He's preexistent and preeminent, risen Victor and Sustainer of all

When v. 18 says Christ is the firstborn from the dead that means preeminent over death. He conquered it and the devil's forces when He rose, He holds the keys of death, and v. 17 says He upholds all things, holding all together.

Many think these verses in Colossians are a hymn, maybe written by Paul.

*Praise ye the Lord who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth
Shelters thee under His wings [and] so gently sustaineth⁴*

That's the message of this ancient hymn, too, for our modern times. As we shelter in place, He shelters us and gently sustains and sovereignly reigns. And v. 16-17 says that includes invisible things like diseases. The universe has no maverick molecules. From the microscope to the telescope, scientists ask what holds together the protons and electrons in an atom or the universe staying together. v. 17 tells us the answer: in Jesus all things hold together.

Kent Hughes writes 'There is a medieval painting which shows Christ in the clouds, and below him the world of humans and nature. From Christ to every object is painted a thin gold thread. The artist was saying that Christ is responsible for sustaining the existence of every created thing.'⁵ Abraham Kuyper said '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!'

We need to see and savor Christ's supremacy, His deity and sovereignty. If you're in turmoil, if you feel low, look up to this glorious Christ, with love beyond all heights. Consider all the worlds His hand has made, the stars and rolling thunder, then sing from your soul how great He is. If you feel small, you are, but look to the matchless massive Lord whose hand spans galaxies, whose hand turns the hearts of Kings, His very hands were pierced for you!

John Piper says it this way, **see and savor ‘the supremacy of his deity, equal with God the Father in all his attributes** — the radiance of his glory and the exact imprint of his nature, infinite, boundless in all his excellencies;

- the supremacy of his eternality that makes the mind...explode with the unsearchable thought [He] never had a beginning, but simply always was
- the supremacy of his never-changing constancy in all his virtues and all his character and commitments — the same yesterday, today, and forever
- the supremacy of his knowledge...wisdom that has never been perplexed by any complication and can never be counseled the wisest of men
- the supremacy of his authority over heaven and earth and hell, without whose permission no man and no demon can move one inch, who changes times and seasons, removes kings and sets up kings; does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; so none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”
- the supremacy of his providence without which not a single bird falls to the ground in the furthest reaches of the Amazon forest, or a single hair...
- the supremacy of his word that moment by moment upholds the universe and holds in being all the molecules and atoms and subatomic world we have never yet dreamed of
- the supremacy of his power to walk on water, cleanse lepers and heal the lame, open the eyes of the blind, cause the deaf to hear and storms to cease and the dead to rise, with a single word...
- the supremacy of his purity never to sin...his trustworthiness never to break his word or let one promise fall to the ground
- the supremacy of his justice to render in due time all moral accounts in the universe settled either on the cross or in hell;
- the supremacy of his patience to endure our dullness for decade after decade; and to hold back his final judgment ... that many might repent;
- the supremacy of his sovereign, servant obedience to his Father... perfectly and then embrace the excruciating pain of the cross willingly;
- the supremacy of his meekness and lowliness and tenderness that will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick;

- the supremacy of his wrath that will one day explode against this world with such fierceness that people will call out for the rocks and the mountains to crush them rather than face the wrath of the Lamb;
- the supremacy of his grace that gives life to spiritually dead rebels and wakens faith in hell-bound haters of God, and justifies the ungodly with his own righteousness;
- the supremacy of his love that willingly dies for us even while we were sinners and frees us to ever-increasing joy in making much of him forever;
- the supremacy of his own inexhaustible gladness in the fellowship of the Trinity, the infinite power and energy that gave rise to all the universe and will one day be the inheritance of every struggling saint... Oh, that God almighty would grant you to see and savor the supremacy of Jesus. That he would grant you to be satisfied with all that God is for you in Jesus.⁶

O taste and see the Lord Jesus is good. Magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt His name together. Let's pray for God's help to keep eyes on Christ.

¹ Exodus 33:20 NKJV.

² *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 673

³ NIV.

⁴ Joachim Neander, "Praise Ye the Lord!"

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*, p. 32.

⁶ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/seeing-and-savoring-the-supremacy-of-jesus-christ-above-all-things>