

## The Supremacy of Christ: Lord of Creation Colossians 1:15-17

### Intro:

**A recent study of heresies by Lifeway Research (SBC) revealed that 52% of Americans and 67% of churchgoers believe that Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.** This is the old heresy called Arianism that was rejected by early church at the Council of Nicaea around A.D. 325<sup>1</sup>. Not too many years later in A.D. 381, the early church at the Council of Constantinople, rejected the teaching of a group called "Spirit Fighters." They taught that the Holy Spirit was a force and not a person.<sup>2</sup> Today 56% of Americans and 63% of churchgoers believe this heresy.<sup>3</sup> Heresies don't go away they just keep reinventing themselves.

**Question: How can church combat heresies? It must teach good doctrine but how does it do that?** In particular, how does a church teach the divinity of Christ? How does a person get his finite mind around the infinite doctrine of divinity of Christ? How do you verbalize it? How do you describe His glory, His majesty and all that He has done for our redemption?

**Our text this morning is big!** It is really big and difficult to get your mind around and even more difficult to adequately and respectfully explain. The reason is it is as big as creation itself and even bigger.

What we have in **vv. 15-20** is the Apostle Paul explaining to the church the supremacy of Christ. The problem is that it is so much to get your mind around that even when one does it justice, it is easily lost because we are limited, weak, forgetful sinners. The vision Paul lays out in these verses quickly fades in our hearts and minds. It takes effort to fight for the joy of that vision.

**Illst:** Distance from Majesty at Mt. Hood National Forest.<sup>4</sup>

**Paul knew we are leaky buckets, leaking the glory of God.** God knew we needed help to keep *beholding our God, beholding the* immensity of the supremacy of Christ. What did He do? He had Paul write a poem in **vv. 15-20**.

**These verses became a confession of faith and a hymn that that the church used in worship.** This poem would help them learn the words to adequately and accurately express the immensity of supremacy of Christ. It was a way of restoring the hope of glory back into our hearts after life has beat us down.

**So from the beginning the church has used hymns and confessions in corporate worship services to teach the congregation who God was, who we are in relation to our Holy God and what Christ did to redeem us.** Paul told the church in **Colossians 3:16** to use worship services to teach and to disciple, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."*

**Worship services are actually spiritual formation for us.** You are discipled well and develop a strong spiritual formation when the worship service is shaped by the gospel. Likewise you are discipled poorly and spiritual formation will be weak when the corporate worship service is NOT shaped by the gospel. *Dr. Nathan Finn, Dean of Theology and Missions at Union University* (a Tennessee Baptist University/SBC affiliated school) in Jackson, TN encourages churches to have an intentional strategy of using statements of faith, creeds and hymns to teach good theology to the church.<sup>5</sup> I agree with Dr. Finn.

**Let me speak just a minute to our own corporate service.** I realize that by adding some prayers and confessions to our service over the past few months it has been a stretch for some of us. I didn't grow up with confession and corporate prayers other than responsive readings out of the Baptist Hymnal. At the time I was growing up Baptist had moved away from how the gospel

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<sup>1</sup> The Nicene Creed was developed from this council and is still in use today.

<sup>2</sup> The movie series Star Wars never try to connect the Holy Spirit to the Force but Christians have picked up on this and the influence of those movies have seeped into the Christian faith.

<sup>3</sup> Nathan Finn, *Name that Heresy*, Facts and Trends, Winter 2017, pp. 23-26.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, p. 209-210.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Finn, *Name that Heresy*, Facts and Trends, Winter 2017, pp. 23-26.

should shape the service. By having the gospel shape the service we are returning to our roots of being historical, orthodox, confessional Baptists.

**Here is what I want you to do.** The temptation for some of us is to conclude the service feels Lutheran, Presbyterian or Catholic or whatever tradition you are familiar. We often conclude that what I grew up with was dead and it may have been a situation where the church loved the liturgy more than Jesus. That is sad but perhaps it was not that the service that was dead but you were spiritually dead. Like Paul persecuting the church and hearing Stephen's sermon as he died something in Stephen's sermon stuck and Paul didn't even know that the gospel was at work and God used it later to bring him to life.

**However, what I want you to do is to focus on the content of the words.** Consider the meaning of the words we sing, the content of the prayers we pray and, of course, the preaching of the word. Think about their meaning of the words and what they are forming in you spiritually.

Many come in on any given Sunday and they have had such a hard week that they lack the words to express their need and a corporate prayer helps to put the words in their mouths that they cannot express. God's glory has leaked out all week because they feel beaten up by life. Many come in without a framework of doctrine and theology and a gospel-shaped service builds spiritual formation into their hearts and minds. For others, good prayers and confession or creeds actually guard against heresy. One of the purposes of vv. 15-20 is to help us behold our God, to help us see how great He is.

So as we gather this morning, what we want vv. 15-20 to do is draw close to majesty and Christ's supremacy. We need to behold our God. **The main point of the sermon is really a question: Is the supremacy of Christ evident in your life?**

#### I. Seeing the Supremacy of Christ in the Text (vv. 15-17)

**Verse 15a: "He is the image of the invisible God"**

- **The Greek word for *image* is the English word *icon*.** This does not mean that Jesus is simply a representation of God but, when you take the whole block of text in vv. 15-17 and the context of the whole Bible, what we learn is that Jesus is God Himself. The Apostle Paul says in **2 Corinthians 4:4** that Jesus is, "... is the *image* of God." Later in **Colossians 2:9**, just to unpack vv. 15-17, Paul says, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."
- In **John 14**, Jesus was teaching His disciples and in v. 6 He said *He was the Way, the Truth and the Life* and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. Then Phillip said in vv. 8-9, "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'?" Jesus was being as clear as He could be so that if you had seen Him you had seen the full revelation of God.
- **Verses 15-20 are a two-edged sword.** These verses are not only a majestic poem and a hymn but they are also a corrective to the false teaching that was infiltrating the church. This little *confession of faith* was to teach the doctrine of the divinity of Christ and leave the church stunned by the supremacy of Christ as God and to guard against false teaching.
- **TRANSITION:** Look at the second half of v. 15.

**Verse 15b: "the firstborn of all creation"**

- **Another key Greek word in this verse is *firstborn*.** The Greek word for *firstborn* (*prototokos*) is the Hebrew idea of *firstborn*. The *firstborn* male in Hebrew culture was the one who received all the glory and all the inheritance. So tapping into the Hebrew idea of the word *firstborn*, as it applies to Christ means, Jesus is the Preeminent One. He is the Supreme One! He is the Exalted One.

- **Paul's words are meant to tell the truth about Jesus.** His words are meant to clarify who Christ is. He is not the first being God created. He is the Preeminent One who is supreme over all.

**Verse 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."**

- In v. 16, Paul is going further to define Jesus with a series of preposition. He is going to leave no doubt that Christ is the God of creation. He says, "***for by him all things were created.***"
  - **What things were created?** All things **IN** heaven, all things **ON** the earth, all things visible and invisible. Things you can see and things you cannot see—Jesus created them all.
  - **Whether these things are thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—Jesus created them.** These are words that relate to the supernatural realms. Paul was giving them a vision of Christ so they when the false teachers came along the pushed for angel worship and the Gnostics pushed for the people to waste time on spiritual mapping of the spiritual realms to identify angels and demons who ruled over portions of the earth in order to try to gain power over them the believers in the Colossian church would say, "*No. Why would I do that? Christ is the Preeminent One. He is supreme over all. Jesus created all of those spiritual beings I cannot see and they submit to His authority and rule. He is all I need.*"
  - **Then you get to the end of the verse and he restates his point by adding new prepositions to clarify his point.** All these things were created ***through him and for him***. So what we see is that ***by him, through him and for him all things were created***. Paul's goal is to be as clear as he can so he stacks preposition on top of prepositions in order to show us who Christ is.

**Verse 17: "*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*"**

- **Notice what he says: He is before all things.** He now has Jesus existing before all of creation including time itself. If Paul did not want to present Jesus as God he would have said: He is before all things except God and God holds all things together through Christ but this is NOT what he said.
- He wanted to be clear—Jesus is God and so he attributes God's creative work from **Genesis 1 and 2** to Jesus.
- Then if that is not enough when Paul gets to the end of v. 17, "*in Him all things hold together*" he is telling us that the very fabric of the universe is being held together by Jesus so not only is Jesus before all things, all things are currently being held together by Him.
  - **Colossians 1:17** sounds a lot like what Yahweh says about Himself in **Isaiah 40:25-26**:  
*"To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.  
Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?  
He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name;  
by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing."*
  - **Colossians 1:17** is saying that Jesus does what God does because Jesus is God. He holds all things together. The very fabric of the universe was woven together and is held together and kept from ripping apart by Christ.
  - **Hebrews 1:3** says that, "*He [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and **he upholds the universe by the word of his power.**"* The same word that spoke the world into existence is the same word that holds the universe together.

- **Illst: According to Physicists there are four forces that make up the physical universe and sustain and hold together the physical universe. There are the: 1. Strong nuclear force, 2. Weak nuclear force, 3. Electromagnetic force and 4. Gravity** (this is the one you are most familiar with).
  - **Strong nuclear force:** This is what holds protons and neutrons together in the nucleus of an atom. If the strong nuclear force were 5% stronger than it is then the sun would not burn but if it were 5% weaker than it is then the sun would explode.
  - **Weak nuclear force:** This is what holds the neutron together. If the weak nuclear force was just a fraction weaker neutrons would be unstable and therefore all the heavy elements of the periodic table would not exist. But if the weak nuclear force were just a fraction stronger then neutron would be too stable and that would prevent the existence of hydrogen, which means—no universe.
  - **Electromagnetic force:** The electromagnetic force is the force that holds atoms together to form molecules and solids. If the electromagnetic force were off by 1 and 10 to the 40<sup>th</sup> power. 1/10 with 40 zeros behind it, then there would be no galaxies, stars, planets or people. Nothing would hold together.
  - There is one astrophysicist, a PhD from Cornell University, which looks at all of this data and said, *“The universe is literally fine tuned for life.”*
  - There are two ways to look at this data: one you can look at this data and say the universe is a random, purposeless accident OR you can believe what **Colossians 1** says . . . the reason the forces fall so specifically within a fractional tolerance of what would even allow us to have life on this planet much less for the universe to exist that there is an Intelligent Being holding it all together and His name is Jesus Christ.
  - **Scholar Douglas Moo says this about these verses,** *“What holds the universe together is not an idea or a virtue but a person—the resurrected Christ. Without Him electrons would not continue to circle nuclei, gravity would cease to work, the planets would not stay in their orbits. Jesus is preeminent not only because He created all things but also because He sustains all things. All things hold together in Him.”*<sup>6</sup>
- **Here is the deal.** It is not enough for us to look at the text and say, *“Yep! There it is. I see the supremacy of Christ from the text pastor. Thanks for showing me that. This is amazing and that was a great physics illustration.”* You see if all you do is get the facts and they are not united with life changing faith then you really don’t get it. So what has to happen? → *Point #2*

## II. Seeing the Supremacy of Christ in Your Life (vv. 15-17)

- So look in v. 18, I am not going to preach all of v. 18; Pastor Eric will be preaching vv. 18-20 next Sunday. I want to pull out one thing to help us make application this morning. **Verse 18 says, “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.”**
- **We might call vv. 15-23: From creation to the cross.** Remember a few weeks ago we find the grand redemptive narrative in Colossians: *Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation/Restoration.*

When we think about creation we go back to the Garden where God created a perfect world. God’s people, Adam and Eve, in God’s place, under God’s rule—the kingdom of God.

Then sin came in at the Fall and fractured, corrupted and has broken His creation. It was at this point things began to come a part.

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<sup>6</sup> Bob Thune, sermon: *Your Own Personal Jesus, Colossians 1:15-18.*

What Jesus is doing now is redeeming, restoring, healing and holding all things together.<sup>7</sup> On the cross Christ satisfied the wrath of God for our sin on the cross by dying in our place and for our sins and rising from the dead. He is creating a new people, the church in His image. He is creating a new humanity. He is recreating what God meant it to be.

It will be fully realized when Christ restores all things in the end but until that time comes what we find in **vv. 15-23** is Christ the Preeminent Lord of all Creation redeeming and creating a new people—the church (God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule—the kingdom of God). As God’s people we are to be a display the supremacy of Christ in our lives in this world.

- **Here is the question: Is the supremacy of Christ evident in our lives?** Is the supremacy of Christ evident in your life? Perhaps a better question is in what area(s) of your life is the supremacy not evident? Perhaps you need to evaluate your life because the distance from what was once so immense is not trivial.
- **Verse 17** says that it is the supremacy of Christ that holds all things together. It is not cotton that the fabric of our lives like the old commercial says—it is Jesus. The reason some of our lives feel like they are coming apart is because the immensity of the supremacy of Christ is a distant reflection in the rearview mirror. We do not behold our God.
  - **Is the supremacy of Christ evident in our families?**

Paul is going to address this in **Colossians 3:18-21** and he certainly has addressed in other letters like Ephesians.

**Marriage:** We say we are a church that practices complementarity in marriage, which we believe to be faithful to Scripture and is a display of the supremacy of Christ. But do our marriages and families reflect it. Are our husbands leading their families spiritually and are they loving their wives as Christ loved the church?

**Spiritual leadership in the home is more than praying before meals and making sure you get to church. Are there family devotions going on in the family?** Are our men, whether single or married, protecting and honoring women? Are we leading them as Christ leads us? Are our husbands laying down their lives for their wives? Are our young single men seeing married men do this so they will be disciplined to live this way?

**Our core value gives us a good summary of what the Bible teaches on families.** It fleshes it out for us in practical ways. It says: *We are committed to building gospel-centered marriages and families. We desire to be a church that:*

- *Encourages and trains families to regularly read, pray, teach and sing God’s Word.*
- *Trains parents to instruct<sup>8</sup> their children and youth in sound doctrine so that they are not blown about by every wind of doctrine and tossed about by the wave of our secular culture. We want our children grounded in the “grammar” of their faith.*
- *Encourages and exhorts husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and encourages wives to respect their husbands as the head of the household.*
- *Turns the hearts of the parents to their children and turns the hearts of the children to their parents.*
- *Encourages singles to pursue marriage or empowers them to be content where God has called them in their singleness by connecting them to the larger family of God.*
- *Trains college students to pursue God’s calling on their lives by connecting them to the larger body of the local church. We want them to have a church family to support them during their collegiate days.*

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<sup>7</sup> Jeff Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency, Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life*, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> We encourage parents to use a solid biblical catechism for further instruction of their children. A good catechism is good for the whole family. Here is a good one that is on line: <http://www.newcitycatechism.com/home.php>.

- **Husband how are you laying down your life for your wife?** How are you living with her in an understanding way? Nurturing her? Leading her and loving her as Christ love the church?
- **Wives are you respecting your husband?** Are you resisting his leadership instead of submitting to it? Are doing things to make his leadership successful or a struggle?
- **Moms and dads are you leading your children** to love and cherish the word of God? How are you teaching them the word of God outside of just coming to church?
- **Let me talk to the children now.** Are you obeying mom and dad? The Scripture says the God gave you your parents and to obey them is to obey Christ. The supremacy of Christ is seen in your obedience to them. Not only that do you realize that when you obey your parents because your friends know you love Jesus it means you are telling them that Christ is supreme in your life? Learn how . . .

○ **Is the supremacy of Christ evident in our finances?**

What would your bank statement say about the supremacy of Christ in your finances? My goal is not to motivate with guilt but when we look at our lives and see if the supremacy of Christ is evident and we find places that it is not then I hope we feel a good measure of godly guilt and shame.

Do you give to the Lord's work in our local church? Our finances are tight in church right now. As the budgeting process begins we are aware that we are smaller in number and our budget will need to be tightened. I am not asking you to tithe. I am asking you to do what the New Testament calls us to do—give generously. We are called to do more than tithe in the local church. Giving is a reflection of our hearts.

Giving to the Lord's work in the local church is not paying our personal bills and doing all we want and if we have something left over we give to the church. Giving to the local church should be the first thing we do. The principle of giving is that we give as the Lord leads us and trust Him to make our ends meet.

Some of you give generously right now and it might be that Christ calls you to give more but some of you do not give at all or give very little. I am not telling you what to give but I am telling you the New Testament model is to give generously and that usually was more than the Old Testament model of 10%.

Since I am hammering away I will just keep going. Giving to the Lord's work in the local church is not finding the cause in the church that you want to give to and then giving to that. For example, it is not that you see something that is important to you and you give to it—like repairing the parking lot or buying a new sound system. I am not talking about someone trying to raise money to go on a mission trip, that is different. I am talking about finding your pet projects and only giving to that. The supremacy of Christ in your giving is that you give to the budget and it is spent according to how it has been assigned by the church.

So what would your bank statement say about the evidence of the supremacy of Christ in your finances?

○ **Is the supremacy of Christ evident in how we use our time?**

Do you ever say that you don't have time to invest in Bible study or to disciple someone or to be discipled but you somehow have time to do everything else you want to do? You and I will make time for our leisure or hobbies but somehow do not have time to read the Bible or invest in a good book to teach us God's word. We have time for our TV shows or trips or other things but not God's word. We can spend hours on Face Book or social media or shopping on the

Internet but do not have time for the word of God. You see how we spend our time reveals our value of the supremacy of Christ in our lives.

- **Is the supremacy of Christ evident in our: work?**

The Apostle Paul is going to address work in **Colossians 3:23-24** when he says, "*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*"

For some of us our witness to our co-workers is damaged because they know we are Christians but we do not do our work as if Christ is preeminent in our lives. We might want to talk to them about Christ but they won't listen to us because it is obvious the majesty of God is not seen in our lives.

- **Does your life sing the supremacy of Christ or does it just mouth the words?**

The reason so many people's lives are falling apart today is because they have no faith in the Preeminent One—Jesus. Perhaps you are here this morning and this is you. Your life seems to be coming a part, what you need is to place your faith in the One who holds all things together.

You see on the cross Jesus Christ's life was torn apart by the wrath of God against your sin. Jesus died and was buried and then He rose from the dead so that when your turn from your sin and to Christ He will recreate your life in Christ and put you in His people who are the new creation of God.

## **Conclusion**

**Song:** Sing acapella for the conclusion of the message: *How Great Thou Art*, Baptist Hymnal #10

**Sending:**

**Benediction Blessing:**

*May you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation.*

*May you rejoice in your sufferings for the sake of your brothers and sisters in Christ, and in your flesh may you complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. (Adapted from Colossians 1:23-24)*