

*Jesus Matters*

**The Point:** Jesus is God, and no one has done what Jesus has done.

**Session Passage:** Colossians 1:15-22

**Colossians 1:15-17**

**Connection to the Point:** Jesus is the Creator of all things.

**Context.** The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Colossae from prison in Rome about A.D. 62. Colossae was a small city in the center of Asia Minor about 100 miles east of Ephesus. Paul had never been there but learned from one of its leaders named Epaphras, who visited the apostle in prison (Col. 1:7; 4:12), that false teachers were infiltrating the congregation. While the specifics of the false teachings are not detailed, Paul's clear assertion of the absolute superiority of Jesus Christ over all spiritual powers indicates one of their tenets was an inferior view of Christ.

The letter to the Colossians opens with a greeting (1:1-2) followed by Paul's thankfulness for the Colossian believers' faith and love (vv. 3-8). The apostle then prayed for the Colossians' continued spiritual growth (vv. 9-12). Paul then noted that through Christ God had rescued believers from the domain of darkness and brought them into the kingdom of light (kingdom of God) through Jesus's sacrifice. By this sacrifice believers have received redemption and the forgiveness of sins (vv. 13-14). Verses 15-20 are believed to be an early Christian hymn that Paul adapted and applied to the Colossian situation. His purpose was to present Jesus as superior over all creation.

**Image of the invisible God** (v. 15). The Greek term for "image" carries the meanings of both representation and manifestation. God made human beings in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). In the New Testament, the term is used in reference to the image of the emperor on Roman coinage (Matt. 22:17-21). Paul used the term in reference to the images of men and animals that people created and worshiped instead of God (Rom. 1:23-25). Revelation speaks of the image of the beast (Rev. 13:14-15; 14:9,11). Believers are being transformed into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49).

Jesus is both the perfect likeness and manifestation (revelation) of God, who cannot be seen by human eyes. "No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he has revealed him" (John 1:18). To see Jesus is to see God the Father (John 14:8-11; 2 Cor. 4:4).

**Firstborn over all creation** (v. 15). While the Greek term for "firstborn" can refer to birth order, in this instance the term is not being used to suggest that Jesus was the first created being by God. Of course, Jesus had no temporal beginning. He existed eternally with the Father before the universe was even created. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). In the context of Colossians, the term speaks of Jesus's special relationship with God the Father; it denotes His superiority or preeminence, like a firstborn son has in his family. That Jesus is firstborn over all creation establishes His unique position of superiority over creation and further defines the meaning of "firstborn." Jesus is separate from His creation (John 1:1-3) and is the one and only Lord of the universe.

**Everything** (v. 16). Paul does not mince words. "Everything" or "all things" means just that, everything that exists. The Greek term for this word appears eight times in this passage ("all," vv. 15,16,17[x2],19; "everything," vv. 16,18,20) further emphasizing that Jesus is the Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all things, and yet separate from His creation. It takes into consideration all things that exist, both in heaven and on earth.

**Created by him** (v. 16). The clear implication of this phrase is that Jesus is God, the Creator of all things (John 1:1-3)! This is the ultimate verification of Jesus's superiority and preeminence over all creation. It also informs the above interpretation of "firstborn" (v. 15).

**In heaven and on earth** (v. 16). Paul expounded on the scope of Jesus's creation. "In heaven" has a dual meaning in this context. First, it refers to the universe of stars and planets. Second, it extends to the spiritual realm of God and the angels. Jesus, God the Son, created both realms. Jesus also created everything on earth, meaning the physical planet and all life

that dwells on it. “All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created” (John 1:3).

**The visible and the invisible** (v. 16) refers to both types of living beings that exist in the created order. Some of them are of a physical nature and thus are visible to the eye. Others are of a spiritual dimension (angels, the devil, and demons) who are normally invisible to the eye. Paul was concerned about reports that false teachers in Colossae were elevating some unseen powers above Christ in their false teachings. Since Jesus created all things, none in the created order could be above Him or His equal.

**Thrones . . . dominions . . . rulers . . . authorities** (v. 16). One aspect of the teachings being espoused by the false teachers was angel worship (2:18). Although these terms could refer to human authorities, Bible expositors generally agree that in this context Paul was referring to spiritual beings. Just because Paul mentioned them does not necessarily mean he recognized their authenticity. Paul’s intent here was not to provide an angelic hierarchy, but rather to emphasize that all spiritual beings are inferior to and under the authority of Christ. Whether spiritual beings or human beings, Christ made them all, He is superior to them all, and He has authority over them all (1:15).

**Through him and for him** (v. 16). Paul reiterated again that all things exist by Jesus’s creative power. Not only were they created by Him but for Him. They were made for His purposes to do His will. And one day, all will bow before Him and confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11).

**Before all things** (v. 17). Jesus is before all things in both the senses that He created all that exists and that He holds the place of preeminence before all of His creation. Jesus, God the Son, created all things through His power and sustains all things; “by him all things hold together” (see Heb. 1:3).

## **Colossians 1:18-20**

**Connection to the Point:** Jesus is the Ruler over all things.

**Head of the body** (v. 18). Having established that Jesus is the Creator and Lord of all things, Paul now turned to the practical consequences of His status. In his letters, Paul used the metaphor of the human body in reference to the church (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-31). That Christ is the head of the body denotes that He is the Ruler of the church. He is its one Leader and Guide.

**The church** (v. 18). The Greek term for “church” means “called out.” It can also be translated as “assembly” or “congregation.” It is used in the Christian context to refer to the local church, the whole body of Christian believers in the world, or of the entirety of believers in both heaven and on earth. The church is a living organism with Christ as its Head.

**The beginning** (v. 18). Paul now established the basis for Jesus’s headship. He started by calling Him the beginning, not in the sense of a beginning in time, but rather that Jesus is the “origin” and “source” of the life of the church. It would not exist without Him. This same Greek word is used by Jesus in Revelation 3:14: “Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the *originator* of God’s creation” (italics added; see also Rev. 21:6; 22:13).

**Firstborn from the dead** (v. 18). As in verse 15, “firstborn” indicates Christ’s supremacy. In this context, Jesus is preeminent by His being the first to be resurrected from the dead never to die again (Rom. 6:8-11). As a result, He has primacy over all Christians who will receive a permanent, bodily resurrection in the future. “But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20; see vv. 21-23, 35-54).

**Fullness** (v. 19). God’s will was that all His fullness dwells in Christ. This is one of the most important terms in this letter, but it is abstract and difficult to interpret. It means “complete” or “total.” In classical Greek it described the total crew of a ship or population of a city. In Colossae it may have been used by false teachers to describe counterfeit supernatural powers they said controlled people’s lives. It is also found in Colossians 2:9, “For the entire *fullness* of God’s nature dwells bodily in Christ” (italics added). In both Scripture passages, Paul used the word to assert that the totality of Deity dwells in Christ, the incarnate Son of God. All the divine attributes are completely present in Him. Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one in essence.

**Through him** (v. 20). Since Jesus is both fully God and fully man, He was qualified to be the Father's agent of atonement for sin. The goal was to "reconcile everything to himself." The extent of the reconciliation includes "things on earth or things in heaven" (see v. 16). As all creation was affected by sin, so now Christ restores all things.

Paul was not saying that all people will be reconciled to God in the sense of being forgiven all their sins, brought into a relationship with God as His children, and receiving eternal life through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Only those who repent and place their faith in Christ will be reconciled in this sense. "Those who respond to his voice will be brought into a relationship of grace and blessing. Those who oppose and reject him will receive eternal punishment involving removal from God's blessings and the active outpouring of his judgment. In the end, everyone and everything will be reconciled in this sense. Everyone and everything will be subordinated to Christ."<sup>1</sup>

**Peace** (v. 20) is the result of reconciliation with God (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:17-18). Forgiveness of sin, new life, well-being, and peace with God are all benefits of being made right with God through Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross (John 3:16; 10:28; 2 Cor. 5:17-18; Col. 2:13-14; 3:15).

## **Colossians 1:21-22**

**Connection to the Point:** Jesus is the Reconciler of all things.

**Alienated and hostile** (v. 21). Paul now focused on the application of what he had written up to this point. He reminded the Colossian believers that before they were reconciled to God through Christ their relationship with God was characterized by alienation (estrangement) and hostility. All sinners are separated from and enemies of God by their sin (Rom. 5:10).

This alienation and hostility originated in their sinful "minds." One of the key aspects of sanctification (transformation into the likeness of Christ) is the renewal of the believer's mind (Eph. 4:20-24). The unbelievers' distorted way of thinking and antagonism toward God have practical consequences. It expresses itself in their "evil actions." Paul did not say what those actions were; he did not need to do so. The Colossian believers knew quite well how they had lived as unbelievers. In that pagan environment people participated in all sorts of immoral perversions.

**Reconciled** (v. 22) means a change from one state of thinking and feeling to another. In this context it refers specifically to the reconciliation of the repentant sinner into relationship with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Even when we were enemies, God through Christ redeemed us and brought us into right relationship with Himself (Rom. 5:8-11).

**Physical body** (v. 22). This refers to Christ's incarnation. Jesus is fully God (John 1:1,18; Col. 2:9), but He is also fully man (Phil. 2:7). The incarnation was the only way Jesus could make atonement for the sins of humanity. As both God and man, Jesus was the perfect mediator between holy God and sinful humanity (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

**Death** (v. 22) is the inevitable end of human life. It is one of the results of mankind's sin (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:19). The death of Jesus was of a different nature. This was not a simple passing away as we normally think of someone dying. His physical death on the cross was the acceptable sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Out of His gracious love, God laid on Jesus, the incarnate Son of God—His Only Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, and the only human being who has ever lived a perfect life in obedience to God (without sin)---the righteous judgment for all of humanity's sins. Therefore, through repentance and faith in Jesus's atoning sacrifice we are forgiven of all our sins, reconciled to God, and receive eternal life (Rom. 3:20-26; 5:1; Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 9:26-28; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

**Holy** (v. 22) refers to people or things set apart for God's use. This is the first of three qualities that result from the reconciliation of believers to God through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Believers are set apart by and sanctified (transformed into Christlikeness) for God. Sanctification is a life-long process. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he urged believers to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship" (Rom 12:1).

**Faultless** (v. 22). Second, Paul wrote that the Colossian believers are faultless or free from accusation. This is a technical word applied to the animals being offered to God as sacrifices. These animals had to be without defect. Of course, the believer's faultlessness is derived from Christ's perfect righteousness being permanently credited to them, not by one's own self-righteousness.

**Blameless** (v. 22). Finally, Paul wrote that believers are blameless or without blemish. This is also language associated with animal sacrifice. Such animals had to be without blemish. Having had their sins exchanged for Christ perfect righteousness and having been reconciled to God, believers now forever stand before God blameless.

One of the responsibilities of having been reconciled to God is that believers are to share with others the message that reconciliation with God is possible by repenting and placing one's faith in Jesus Christ. "Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

1. Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), 227.