

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Colossians 1:15-23

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Today there are many attacks upon the significance, and supremacy, and preeminence, and deity of Christ.
 - i. Jews deny Christ's deity and Messiahship.
 - ii. Muslims claim He was merely a prophet, but not as great as Muhammed. He neither died on the cross nor rose from the grave.
 - iii. Mormons deny the Trinity – that Christ is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. They teach that Jesus is the first creation of the Father.
 - iv. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus is an angel.
 - v. Liberal Christians deny that Christ is the only way to God.
 - vi. Roman Catholics have a fairly orthodox Christology, but in practice they minimize His importance by putting so much emphasis on the worship of Mary.
2. The church in Colossae also faced attacks on the doctrine of Christ.
 - i. A false teaching was circulating that involved the worship of angels. It was an early form of Gnosticism. The false teachers claimed the following:
 - ii. Matter is evil, and therefore God did not create. The work of creation was delegated to angels. Jesus was one of these angels.
 - iii. These angels controlled the realm between heaven and earth, and so the only way to speak to God, or hear from God, was through the worship of these angels.
 - iv. These angels also controlled people's lives. By worshiping superior angels, these angels would then subdue and overcome evil angels.
3. Paul wrote the letter of Colossians, and this passage in particular, to correct the Colossian heresy. To point to the full deity, humanity, and supremacy of Christ.

II. TEXT

1. Colossians 1:15-23

III. 10 REASONS FOR THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

1. **He is the image of the invisible God.**
 - i. **Colossians 1:15** "He is the image of the invisible God."
 - ii. God is invisible. 1 Timothy 1:17 "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."
 - iii. But Jesus came and showed us what God is like.
 - iv. "Image" (Gk. Eikon) refers to an exact visible representation of something or someone.
 - v. One translation says Jesus is "the very incarnation of the unseen God."
 - vi. One of the reasons Jesus came to earth was to reveal God to us.

1. John called Him the Word (Gk. Logos), meaning God's message to us; God's communication to us; God's revelation to us.
 2. Hebrews 1:2 "In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son."
 3. John 1:18 "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."
 4. John 10:30 "I and the Father are one."
 5. John 14:9 "The one who has seen me has seen the Father."
- vii. What did Jesus reveal about God's nature when He came to earth? God's moral character. Jesus perfectly displayed God's righteousness and love without any sin.
1. 2 Corinthians 5:21 "He did not know sin"
 2. Hebrews 4:15 He "has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin."
 3. 1 John 3:5 "there is no sin in him"
 4. John 1:14 He is "full of grace and truth"
- viii. For this reason Jesus is supreme above all.

2. He is the firstborn over all creation.

- i. **Colossians 1:15** "the firstborn over all creation"
- ii. This is one of the most misinterpreted verses in the Bible. Many cultic groups, such as the Arians, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Mormons, have used this verse to support the notion that Jesus is not eternal; He had a beginning; He was created; there was a time when Jesus did not exist. But that's not at all what is meant here with the term "firstborn."
- iii. The term "firstborn" has to do with the position of rank and privilege and authority usually passed down from father to the eldest son. But it is not always the eldest son. For example, Isaac and Jacob were given the rank of firstborn, even though they were not born first. The Bible refers to Israel as God's firstborn, even though it was not the first nation (Ex 4:22; Jer 31:9). The Bible refers to King David as the firstborn, even though he was not the first king, or even the firstborn son in his family (Ps 89:27). It means that they have a position of rank and privilege and authority above all others. Christ is the firstborn over all creation because He is supreme over all creation. Firstborn means highest in rank and authority, not first to be created.
- iv. Consider a king. When a king hands over the kingdom to his firstborn son, he is placing him in charge of the kingdom. When the Bible says that Christ is the firstborn over all creation, it means that God the Father has chosen Christ to rule over all creation.
- v. He has been chosen as God's heir to rule God's kingdom.
- vi. Matthew 28:18 "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."
- vii. This makes Christ supreme over all.

3. He is the creator of everything.

- i. **Colossians 1:16** “For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him.”
- ii. Three prepositions are used to describe Christ’s relationship with creation: By, through, and for.
 1. Everything was created by Him.
 2. Everything was created through Him.
 3. Everything was created for Him. For His pleasure and glory.
- iii. John 1:3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.
- iv. Hebrews 1:2 “In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him.”
- v. Notice the phrase, “the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through him and for him.”
 1. Many scholars believe this refers to four classes of angelic beings. An angelic hierarchy.
 2. Remember that the false teachers at the time said that angels created the universe, and Christ was one of them.
 3. Paul says that Christ created everything – even the angels. And that all of creation – including the angels – were created for Him.
- vi. This is also a statement by Paul of Christ’s deity. That Christ is God. Here the Bible says that Jesus is the creator. The Old Testament says that God is the creator. Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This makes Christ equal to and one with the God of the Old Testament.
- vii. Christ is supreme because He is the creator.

4. He is before all things.

- i. **Colossians 1:17** “He is before all things”
- ii. This refers to Christ’s eternality. Christ had no beginning; no origin; no source; He was not created; there was never a time when He did not exist. He is eternal; co-eternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.
- iii. Remember, many false religions teach that Christ is not eternal; He had a beginning; He was created. But this is not the teaching of the Bible.
- iv. John 1:1-2 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.”
- v. John 8:58 Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”
- vi. Revelation 22:13 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

- vii. Jesus is eternal. He was there before the creation of the universe, because He created it.
- viii. Christ is supreme because He is before all things.

5. He holds all things together.

- i. **Colossians 1:17** “and by him all things hold together.”
- ii. He sustains creation. He keeps it from falling apart.
- iii. **ESV Study Bible** “He prevents creation from falling into chaos and disintegrating.”
- iv. **Phillips** Jesus is “the upholding principle of the whole scheme of creation.”
- v. **TCNT** “And all things depend upon him for their existence.”
- vi. **Hebrews 1:3** “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”
- vii. Christ is not merely the creator; He is the sustainer. He holds all things together. He keeps things going. He keeps things working. He keeps things alive. He keeps things spinning. He keeps things safe.
- viii. The religion of Deism holds that there is a God who created the universe, but who is not at all involved in the universe. He put the battery in and started it like a cell phone, but then He just left it alone. He is completely transcendent, distant, uninvolved, unconcerned. There are not miracles. Nothing supernatural happens, because God is uninvolved. That is not what the Bible says of God and Christ. Christ holds all things together.
- ix. Christ keeps your heart beating; your lungs breathing; your brain thinking. He prevents disease from consuming your body. You are alive today only because He is holding you together. He prevents mankind from completely destroying itself, and the world around us. He keeps the planets spinning; the sun burning. He prevents meteors from destroying the earth. He keeps the rivers flowing, and the waves breaking. He keeps the saltwater salty, and the fresh water fresh. He makes sure that the sun doesn’t burn too hot, or get too cold. He makes sure the planets are just the right distance from one another. He keeps His eye on everything occurring in the universe. He knows how many hairs are on your head; how many cells make up your body. He knows it when a bird falls from the sky. He holds all things together. Without Christ, it would all fall apart immediately.
- x. Christ is supreme.

6. He is the head of the church.

- i. **Colossians 1:18** “He is also the head of the body, the church”
- ii. The term “head” means that Christ is the leader, the authority, the boss.
- iii. Christ is in charge of the church.
- iv. We can learn much about the church from the “body” metaphor:
 - 1. The church is means that Christ uses to accomplish His purposes.

2. The body is made up of many members, and each plays an important part.
 3. The body parts are connected to each other, and affect each other.
 4. The body parts must care for one another.
 5. The body parts must work together.
 6. The body can do nothing without a vital connection to the head.
- v. Christ is supreme because He is the head of the church.

7. He is the firstborn from the dead.

- i. **Colossians 1:18** “he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead”
- ii. Many people were raised from the dead in the Bible. But Christ’s resurrection was different in two respects:
 1. He was raised to eternal life, never to die again.
 2. He was raised to life with a new, glorified body.
- iii. Therefore, Christ is the firstborn from the dead.
- iv. Because of Christ and His resurrection, we can look forward to our own resurrection. To eternal life after death. And to a new glorified body.
- v. Philippians 3:30-21 “20 but our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.”
- vi. Christ is supreme because He is the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25).

8. He is God.

- i. **Colossians 1:19** “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him”
- ii. “Fullness” (Gk. Pleroma). Remember that the Gnostic false teachers believed that there was no direct connection between God and man. Instead, angels, or intermediary beings filled the space between God and the world, and to communicate with God, people had to communicate through the angels. There was a word that the Gnostic teachers used to refer to all of the angels, or intermediary beings between God and man. It was the word *pleroma*, fullness. Paul, however, said that all of God’s fullness dwelled in Christ.
- iii. This was a way of saying that Christ is God. He is not an angelic being inferior to God. He is God, the creator of the angels.
- iv. Colossians 2:9 “For the entire fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily in Christ,”
- v. Doctrine of the Trinity: The Bible teaches there is one God in three persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal, and co-eternal.
- vi. Christ is supreme because He is God!

9. He is the only way to peace with God.

- i. **Colossians 1:20** “and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven”

- ii. To reconcile means to reestablish a right relationship; or to bring back into a proper relationship.
- iii. Verse 21 describes the problem that needed to be solved. "Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds expressed in your evil actions."
- iv. Apart from Christ, we are God's enemies. We are at war with God because we are devoted to doing our will rather than His. This hostility against God made us alienated (separated; estranged). If a person dies separated from God, the punishment is eternal separation, or hell.
- v. So God sent Christ to reconcile us to God; to bring us back into a right, proper relationship with God.
- vi. How was this accomplished?
 - 1. Colossians 1:20 "by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."
 - 2. Colossians 1:22 "But not he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death"
- vii. Jesus died for our sins, in our place, as our substitute, paying our penalty, so that God could turn His wrath away from us and forgive us.
- viii. Jesus is the only way we can have peace with God. 1 Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus"
- ix. Jesus is supreme because He is the only one who has solved man's sin problem.

10. He shed His blood on the cross.

- i. **Colossians 1:20** "by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."
- ii. Christ is supreme because of what He willingly endured for our salvation. He didn't merely snap His fingers; He didn't merely say the word, as He did with the creation of the universe. He shed His blood on the cross. He endured the most horrible kind of suffering, and torture, and punishment imaginable to deliver us from the penalty of sin.
- iii. Compare all of the religions of the world and you will come to this conclusion: Jesus died on the cross. No other God or prophet or holy man endured so much for others.
- iv. Christ's great sacrifice for us makes Him supreme, and makes Him worthy of our love and devotion.

IV. OUR RESPONSE TO HIS SUPREMACY

1. Live for His glory.

- i. **Colossians 1:16** "For everything was created by him.... All things have been created through him and for him."
- ii. We must devote our lives to living for Him, and not for ourselves (2 Cor 5:15). We must devote our lives to glorifying Him, and not ourselves. We must devote our lives to pleasing Him, and not ourselves.

2. Give Him first place in everything.

- i. **Colossians 1:18** “He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.”
- ii. Christ must be our priority. We must put Him first in everything. First in our finances; first in our affections; first in our time; first in our attention; first in your effort and energy; first in your goals; first in your family; first in your marriage; first in your sexuality; first in your friendships; first in your education.
- iii. Practically I encourage you to give Christ the first hour of your day, the first day of the week, and the first ten percent of your finances.
- iv. The title of a famous devotional book by Oswald Chambers describes how we should give Christ first place in everything. It is called “Our utmost for His Highest.”

3. Pursue Holiness before Him.

- i. **Colossians 1:21-22** “21 Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds expressed in your evil actions. 22 But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him”
- ii. Christ died not just to get us into heaven, but to clean us up so that we fully glorify and please God. We must devote ourselves to holiness in response to His supremacy.
- iii. We must pursue a life that is completely absent of sin.

4. Remain grounded and steadfast in the faith.

- i. **Colossians 1:23** “if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard”
- ii. The goal of Christ’s death is ultimately to present us to God holy, faultless, and blameless. But this is only possible if we remain grounded and steadfast in the faith. Only if we keep our faith in the gospel. Only if we keep our faith in the truth of God’s word.
- iii. Colossians 2:8 “Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ.”
- iv. We must be careful not to shift away from the truth, or to water down the truth, or to get distracted from the truth of God’s word.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Jesus Christ is supreme. He is preeminent. He is highest. He is greatest. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.
2. Let us give ourselves completely to Him – body, soul, and mind. He is worthy.