

Christ Is First In ALL

Colossians 1:15-20 NKJ ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Christ is first in Paul's thoughts.

After his greetings and words of thanksgiving Paul begins his letter with a strong Christological statement. This is typical of Paul. And we should learn to follow in his footsteps always putting Christ first in all things.

Last summer when we studied Ephesians we saw this also. The first couple chapters were about God's plan in Christ and our redemption through Him. Many may think let us get to the practical stuff. Let us go to Ephesians five where we learn about how to have a good marriage. What difference does it really make if Christ choose me before the world, that was then this is now.

But in everything we have to start with the beginning and Christ is always the beginning. Paul doesn't start with Christology just to be flowery, but because it is only when we understand Christ and what he has done for us that we understand the rest.

Just as an example it is nearly impossible for anyone to have a correct view of marriage unless they first understand how Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Without that model we might think our marriage is pretty good. But when we consider Christ's love for the church we realize how much room we have for improvement, how far short we fall.

Therefore as we go through these more abstract ideas, remember that 1. we are learning about our Savior and 2. we are laying a base that will later give us wisdom when dealing with other more concrete problems.

Therefore Paul puts Christ first in his thoughts, writings and life and is therefore well equipped in all things.

Nor was it just Paul. This was also the life of the early church. The section that we have here is assumed by many scholars to be an early hymn. This shows us a church that from very early on recognized the full deity of God and made Him the center of their worship life. Much can be seen about a church by its hymnal. Is Christ the center and focus of their songs?

The early church rejoiced in Christ and thrived in that fullness of rejoicing.

May the Lord grant us grace to learn to do the same today.

Paul divides Christ's preeminence into two very distinct categories. First in verses 15 - 17 Christ is over all creation, this preeminence is his by virtue of His deity and His power. Second in verses 18-20 He is preeminent in the church, this preeminence is His by virtue of His suffering and death, His blood and His resurrection.

Christ is first over all creation by virtue of His deity and power.

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

Here right away is another passage and phrase that you can argue with your Jehovah's witness friends about. "**the image of the invisible God.**" The word image here, or in the greek eikon, can mean only a representation. Thus Christ holding a roman coin asks his disciples, "whose image is this?" They correctly answer that it is Caesar's. In this case the word clearly means a representation not the real or full thing.

However in Hebrews 10:1 Paul reminds us that the law is only a shadow and not "the true image" of these things. In this case eikon clearly means not just a representation but the full true thing itself. That this is true in our text is beyond doubt.

For one thing the very next verse indicates that all things were created by Him. Thus Christ does a thing that only God can do to create out of nothing.

For another consider the comparison between here and Genesis 2. Adam was created in the image of God. That is to say the image of God was given to Him. But that image was not given to Christ in our verse. He was not created in that image, but instead that image was his by rights from eternity. He *is* the image of the invisible God.

Thus he is the image of the invisible. That is to say God whom we cannot see can be seen in Christ. Thus we do not seek to understand God apart from Christ, for God can only be understood in Christ. It is in Christ that God is shown to us.

He is also the firstborn over all creation. If we were to take this word too literally we might fall into the trap of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Firstborn seems to imply that Christ was born or created first before all the creation. But that is not the true force of the word here. Here it is primarily concerned with His right to rule, as was the right of the firstborn. This is seen instantly in the way that Paul uses the word. Notice how the whole force of Paul's argument is on His authority over all other authority.

Let us follow Paul's train of thought here. He created all things, therefore He is above all things, even things invisible, even things in heaven, therefore also all authority.

As Paul points out elsewhere, Christ has all power, therefore all authority comes from Him.

Here we have an example of how correct theology leads to correct Christian living. Many Christians and this was certainly true of both the Jews and the early church, were tempted to think that since Christ is our Lord we do not have to listen to or obey the earthly authority. Paul shows this is definitely not true. In fact the opposite is true. Because Christ is head of all, therefore all authorities are from him, therefore we ought to honor and obey all authority as though Christ himself were talking to us.

Christ is first in the Church by virtue of His suffering.

¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

He is the first in power and authority over all creation for He is God with all the power of God. But Paul says He is also first in the church and this came in a very different way. It was not His always by right of His eternal deity, but it became His through suffering and death. So that now He is the head of the Church.

Our nature is sometimes to think there must be other ways of salvation but if we ever allow another way we make a mockery of Christ. Why then did He die if there was another way? To say there is any other way is to remove His glory as the head of the church. It would also remove His glory as the one through whom the church was reconciled. Remember the angels sang, "worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive glory and honor"

Thus He is first in the church because He was first in suffering, in death, and in resurrection. If we would join Him in the resurrection we must follow Him in suffering and in death.

From the very beginning it was God's will that Jesus go first into suffering. You see in Gen 3 when Adam and Eve fell into sin. God did not first require punishment and payment from them but offered Himself as payment first. He did not demand that they make up for what they did wrong, but He gave himself first. It was Adam and Eve who sinned but it was Christ first who bore the punishment.

Thus if anyone would like to be like Christ to grow in to Christ. We need to be first. First not in demanding our way and pushing your weight around, but first in forgiveness, first in love, first in suffering gladly for another's sake. First not in making sure the other is repentant, or makes up for what they did, or gets what is coming to them, but first to forgive. If any of you say, " I am a good Christian," let him be the first to forgive, no matter what you think your brother owes you.

Whoever has anger or hatred or resentment or unforgiveness in their hearts is not following Christ. For Christ is first to forgive and first to suffer, and first to death. "Therefore God has also highly exalted him."

Thus Christ is first in all things. First in power and glory and authority, but also in forgiveness, suffering, and death. And next week we will see how we are brought into this fullness of His glory.

Amen