



## Colossians 1:13-20

### The Incomparable All-sufficient Christ

The apostle Paul declares the preexistence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He was full of Christ. The letter to Colossians stresses the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ more than any of his letters.

Jesus Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15).

“It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him” (v. 19).

In Christ Jesus “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3).

“In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority . . .” (2:9-10).

The special self-revelation of God is at the foundation of Christianity. God revealed Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He revealed His perfect will in Christ.

The place of knowledge in the Christian life is extremely important. However in the Colossian church there were teachers who had made their own brand of spiritual knowledge the goal of the Christian life. They claimed a higher superior knowledge reserved for a select few of super-Christians. They considered themselves the elite. They claimed a higher knowledge, a super spiritual experience that exceeded everyone else.

The apostle Paul responded to this nonsense. The heretics called themselves Christians because they included Christ in their name and scheme much like cults do in our day. You can use the name of Jesus Christ and still be a cult. These false teachers assumed that the person and work of Jesus Christ was not adequate for a complete salvation. They were teaching that Christ is only one among many spiritual authorities. They claimed Christ was a lord, but not the one true Lord God. They said Jesus was only one among many lords. They denied the true gospel by denying the all-sufficiency of Christ.

Paul’s message is powerful: "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13, NASB95).

God has delivered us from a terrible situation. It is another way of saying He saved us.

“The domain of darkness” is that evil force that enslaves and imprisons people. The power of sin enslaves men and women. However, God in Christ

people. The power of sin enslaves men and women. However, God in Christ has delivered those who believe on Christ. The believer has a new master and we live under his authority. "The reign of Christ has already begun. His kingdom is a present kingdom" (Lightfoot).

Jesus Christ "has delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son He loves" (NET). We are not just delivered from sin, but we are transferred us from one kingdom to another. This is a vivid description of the reality of God's saving grace and power. The word "transferred" in the original meant to literally remove a group of people from one place and put them somewhere else. It was used of deposing a king, terminating employment, and executing a person. Believers in Christ have been transferred from the power of sin to the kingdom of His beloved Son. This is an actual present reality. It is true of you right now if you have placed your trust in Christ. Great is God's power to deliver us.

We have been transferred from the kingdom or rule of sin to the sovereign lordship of Christ. We are members of His kingdom and He is our master.

When did this take place? God makes us heirs of an inheritance the moment we believed on Christ as our savior. Our actual full possession of our inheritance will take place when Christ returns, but the criterion to receive an inheritance took place at our conversion. He has already delivered us from Satan's dominion, but even this will become more evident in the future.

How did God accomplish this? Paul adds: in Christ "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" in verse 14 (NASB). In Christ Jesus we have redemption. The background of this word was slavery which was common when the apostle Paul was writing in the first century AD. Slaves could be set free upon a price and this price was called redemption. The picture of salvation in this passage of Scriptures is the imagery of a slave who is under dominion of a hard and cruel master. The slave had no power to negotiate his own freedom. However, Jesus Christ paid the full redemption price and set him free. Christ does for the believing sinner what the sinner cannot do for himself. He delivers us from the bondage of sin. Jesus Christ purchased us and set us free. We have been emancipated. Therefore, we become His bond-servants. He is our lord and master and we serve Him out of love and thanksgiving.

Believers in Christ Jesus have received "forgiveness of sin." What a great sense of peace to know that every sin, all my sins are forever forgiven. There is no greater sense of peace than that. No matter what Satan may try to throw in my face. All of my sins are forever under the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. This is true of you if you have put your trust in Christ. The central feature of redemption is the forgiveness of all our sins.

This is why the apostle Paul can sing about Jesus.

Such deliverance and forgiveness make the world ask, who is this Jesus? How can one man accomplish such a feat? Who is Jesus Christ? The apostle Paul turns his attention to that subject and gives us a fuller

a feat? Who is Jesus Christ? The apostle Paul turns his attention to that subject and gives us a fuller knowledge of Christ so we can reject false teachings. The doctrine of Christ was the basic truth threatened by the Gnostic teachers at Colossae. Since their teachings are repackaged about every fifteen to twenty years by the media it is good for us to focus our attention on this all important question. Who is Jesus Christ?

## **CHRIST THE LORD OF CREATION (1:14-19)**

A well educated, well traveled man asked me recently, "Do you really think Jesus Christ can save a person in this sophisticated world? This is nothing like the day in which He lived." The truth is man has not changed. He is still a radically depraved sinner. There is no other solution to our sin problem. "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NASB95). Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6, NASB95).

We live in a Christ-centered universe. Jesus Christ is Lord over all creation.

Note carefully, however, that Christ is distinct from creation. He is not a part of creation. He was not created. "His is the primacy over all created things" (NEB). Throughout this passage of Scripture the apostle Paul assumes the preexistence of the Son of God.

### ***Christ is the image of the invisible God***

"He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15, NASB95).

This is one of four great Christological passages of the apostle Paul. Paul addresses the deity of Christ. Jesus is the exact likeness of God; He is a mirror image and perfectly represents God to us. He makes God known to us. While God made man in the image of God, Christ is the image of God. All the fullness of God is revealed in Him. Jesus reveals the nature, power and majesty of God.

Let's be careful not to fall into the trap of the cults that teach the image of God in a material or physical manner. "Christ always has been, is, and always will be the image of God," writes Curtis Vaughn. "Christ is the image of God in the sense that the nature and the being of God are perfectly revealed in Him."

Paul uses the word "image" (*eikon*) which does not imply a weakened or feeble copy of the original, but the illumination of its inner core and fundamental nature. The "image" shares in reality what it represents. In the person of Jesus Christ the being and nature of God has been perfectly demonstrated. In Jesus the invisible has become visible. Christ is the image of God in the sense that He is the exact likeness of God. Christ is the perfect likeness of God. He not only represents Him but also fully and completely manifests Him.

The apostle Paul assumes the real humanity of Jesus and affirms His full deity. Jesus Christ is God with us. He is fully human and fully God. He is the one and only God-man.

The writer of Hebrews wrote: "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3, NASB95).

Jesus is the perfect imprint of the very image of God; He bears the very stamp of God's nature.

What is God like? Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). He is the genuine

likeness of the God men have never seen. He is the perfect revelation of God.

He is the visible representation and expression of God. He is the incarnation of the invisible God. When the disciples looked into the face of Jesus they saw the unapproachable and unseen God. The nature and being of God are perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. We have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. "In the exalted Christ the unknowable God becomes known" (Peake).

"No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18, NASB95). "Jesus is the idea of God and the expression of God. . . . Jesus is the Shekinah glory of God for those who have eyes to see," notes A. T. Robertson.

Jesus Christ is the authentic revelation of God to man and God's agent in creation and redemption. He is the all-sufficient and supreme manifestation of God and worthy of our absolute trust.

Proverbs chapter eight describes the personification of Wisdom. The ancient Jews interpreted Wisdom as God's image. Therefore, to praise Christ as the image of God was to affirm that He is the preexistent Lord of creation. Jesus is the living incarnation of God's power, wisdom and nature.

Jesus Christ is on par with God the Father and always has been throughout eternity.

### ***Christ is the firstborn of all creation***

Let me make it very clear, it would be impossible for the Creator to be created. When the apostle Paul says that Christ is the "firstborn of all creation" he does not mean that Christ was a creature like all the rest of creation. Christ is prior in time and superior in rank to all of creation. He is eternal and never had a beginning. He is prior in time and superior in rank to all of creation. He stands apart and above all creation.

Jesus Christ is the eternal Word, the Son of God in an absolute and unique sense. He is the very image and embodiment of the Father and the complete revelation of His unique nature.

The absolute supremacy of Christ is proclaimed by Paul against every Gnostic assumption. Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15, NASB95).

### **"Firstborn"**

The word "firstborn" (*prototokos*) has the idea of priority in time and supremacy in rank or dominion or sovereignty. The word emphasizes the preexistence and uniqueness of Christ and His superiority over creation. "Christ is before all creation in time; He is also over it in rank and dignity," observes Curtis Vaughn.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." (John 1:1-3, NASB95)

Jesus is superior to every aspect of creation. He stands above every creature. He is the agent in the work of creation. He is the Creator of the whole universe. Elliott says Christ is "the creative center of all things, the causal element of their existence."

Jesus Christ stands at the head above all created things. The apostle Paul is stressing the priority of Jesus' rank as over and above creation.

rank as over and above creation.

The Greek word translated “firstborn” here cannot be interpreted to mean that Christ was a creation or a created being. He was not created; Christ was not the first created being. He was not procreated like any human being. He was God incarnate. In the great mysteries of God He was contracted to a span and placed in the womb of the Virgin Mary and grew and in time was born of the flesh. This guaranteed His sinlessness.

“The Judaic Gnostic heretics had their grades of angels whom they exalted while they degraded Christ from his primacy over all creation,” notes Robertson.

Christ existed before all things and is the Creator.

One of the modern cults teaches, "God (Heavenly Father) is an exalted man with a physical body of flesh and bone. The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ, so he is literally our elder brother." Wow! That is far removed from Biblical truth. Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and truth.” God is not an exalted man with a physical body of flesh and bone. Jesus was not born to heavenly parents. He was born of a virgin, but He did not have a human father, and God the Father did not have sex with Mary as the cults teach. When the apostle John says Jesus is “the only begotten Son,” he is saying that Jesus is unique, one of a kind. It is true that all Christians are children of God, but Jesus is God’s Son in a unique, one-of-a-kind sense. This is the meaning of *monogenēs* in all its uses in the Gospel of John (1:14, 1:18, 3:16, and 3:18).

Another cult teaches that Christ created all other things after He was created. However, Christ is before all creation in time, and He is over all creation in authority.

### **Why is Christ the Lord over creation?**

The apostle Paul stresses: "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16, NASB95).

The universe was created by means of Christ and for Him. He is the owner. All things have been created in Him, by Him, and for Him. He planned it and produced it for His own good pleasure.

Christ is the architect or originator and designer of creation. Everything originated with Him. He is the agent of creation. He is the builder.

Christ sustains the universe. Paul leaves no room for any Gnostic angelic agents in creation. “By Him” or “in Him all things were created” teaches that Christ is the “sphere” within which the work of creation takes place. Lightfoot notes that all the laws and purposes which guide the creation and government of the universe reside in Christ.

Did you notice how Paul brings all of creation into subjection to Christ? Things in heaven, on the earth, visible, invisible, thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities are all for Him. No matter whatever angelic powers that exist, Christ is the One who made them and is their Lord.

Christ is not only the immediate instrument of creation, but also the Lord of all creation.

“All things” meaning the universe as a collective whole came into being “in Him,” “through Him,” and “unto Him.” Everything is centered in Christ. Creation occurred within the sphere of Christ’s person and power.

Him.” Everything is centered in Christ. Creation occurred within the sphere of Christ’s person and power. The act of creation rested in Christ. God made the whole universe through Him. Christ is the means of creation. He is the sphere, the intermediate mediating agent and the purpose of its existence.

“All things” includes everything with no exceptions. Whatever is “in heaven” or “on earth,” “visible” or “invisible” is included. “All things” were created points to a particular time when creation took place, and the resulting action of that creation is that it stands created. The whole universe owes its being to Christ.

The ancient Jewish rabbis taught that the world was created for the Messiah. Christ is the end for which all things exist. He is the goal toward whom all things were intended to move. Everything in creation was intended to serve Him and contribute to His glory.

Jesus declared: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13, NASB95). There is a day coming when “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11, NASB95). The apostle Paul tells us that when Christ returns in glory He will subject all things unto the Father, after He has first subjected all things to Himself. That sovereignty includes every rule, authority and power.

“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17, NASB95). Christ sustains the universe. Christ Himself, Christ and no other, is before all things and He holds it all together. It is impossible for Him to have been created. He is the eternal preincarnate Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Again, the apostle Paul places emphasis on the priority in time and rank. His existence is before all things.

Jesus Christ is the center of the universe. As Creator, Jesus Christ is prior in time and rank. He existed before all creation. The apostle Paul declares the absolute preexistence of the Son of God. Jesus stated this clearly in John 8:58. “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58, NASB95).

The apostle Paul stresses not only that Christ is the creator, but He holds all of creation together. “And in Him all things hold together” simply means Christ is the principal of cohesion in the universe. Christ makes the universe “a cosmos instead of a chaos” (Lightfoot).

### **How does Christ sustain the universe?**

Christ sustains the universe by the word of His power. If He didn’t the universe would disintegrate.

In his great speech before the Athenians the apostle Paul declared that it is in Christ that “we live and move and exist . . .” (Acts 17:28).

How tragic if we like those philosophers in Athens fail to understand this great truth and bow in submission to Him.

Christ is Lord of the universe.

Just as Christ is the head of the creation He is the head of the new creation. He is head of the local church and the universal church.

### **CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH (1:18-20)**

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The apostle Paul states that Christ "is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything" (Colossians 1:18, NASB95).

Christ is the "head" of His body, the church. There is a vital relationship between the body and the head. The body does not give order to the head; the head gives direction; Christ is its sovereign. He is the source of life for the church. He guides and governs it. He energizes it. Remember the allegory of the vine? Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NASB95).

The pronoun "He" is in emphatic position in the original language and means "He and he alone" is the head of the church. Christ alone, Christ and none other is the head of the church. The words "head of the body, the church" also suggests an intimate relationship or vital union between Christ and the members of His body.

How easy that truth is forgotten in our day. We take pride in independence and democracy. How sad when we forget that Christ alone is the head of the local church. He must at all times be Lord of the local congregation or assembly.

In this passage it is best to take "church" as embracing all of God's redeemed people. The "church" is the living organism composed of believers who have been joined in vital union with Christ and one another. This body of Christ is the means by which Christ accomplishes His eternal purpose. "Christ is the head of each local church as He is the head of the general or universal church. . . We are all members of one body in Christ who is our head," notes A. T. Robertson. The Gnostic heretics in Colossae did not hold Christ as head of the church.

### **Why is Christ the head of the church?**

Christ is the origin and source of the church's life. He gave His life for her. Christ loved the church and "gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). Moreover, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything" (Col. 1:18b). Christ is the firstborn from the dead. He is the first to come from the dead in true resurrection life, never to die again. Yes, others had been brought to life only to die again with the exception of Elijah. However, the body of Christ shares in this new and higher life by virtue of our vital union with the resurrected Christ. "Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20, NASB95). He is "the firstborn from the dead." He is the Prince of Life, the conqueror of death, and because He lives we too shall live. He is the life-giving Spirit.

Because Christ is the "first fruits" from the dead He reigns as the sovereign living Lord. This is why He has preeminence in everything. He is the Lord of the living.

As the Creator, Christ is the Lord of creation, and as the resurrected Christ He is Lord over His new Creation. Again the emphasis in the original language suggests the preeminence of Christ. "He Himself, He and He alone" will have first place in everything! He alone is the supreme head over all things. What a great God and Savior we worship. There is no other comparison.

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:19-20, NASB95).

Here is the ultimate reason we bow and worship Him. God has decreed the supremacy of Christ over His



Here is the ultimate reason we bow and worship Him. God has decreed the supremacy of Christ over His church and the universe.

John Calvin said, "It was so arranged in the providence of God." It was the will of God that Christ reign as sovereign because in Him dwells all the fullness of God and it is through Him that God has reconciled all things to Himself through His precious blood.

### **The fullness of God in Christ**

Christ is Lord because "it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him." God willed that in Christ all the fullness should dwell. God had the good pleasure in the indwelling of all the divine powers and attributes in the Son. The Father willed for the plenitude of the Godhead to make Himself at home in the Son.

The fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ in a permanent dwelling. "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9; cf. Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). "Whatever God has He has conferred upon His Son," observes Calvin. All of God's attributes are conferred upon His Son in the weight of glory. It is the whole of the divine perfections.

God in all His fullness is all that God is. It is that which makes Him God, and "it was the Father's good pleasure for all" that "fullness to dwell in Him." Don't miss the word "dwell." This is a permanent residence as opposed to a temporary journey. The fullness of deity permanently abides in Christ. It is a lasting abode. The fullness of deity is eternally resident in the Son. The divine fullness is eternally resident in Jesus Christ.

What a great God and Savior we worship! Christ is not just one of many deities, or ways to get to heaven. There is no other name under heaven by which you may be saved. He is the only mediator between sinful men and a holy God. No one comes to the Father but through Him.

And this is the One who became flesh, dwelt among us, "and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:20, NASB95). There is nothing more humbling than that thought. He did it to redeem and reconcile depraved sinful men and women. The false teachers denied the full humanity of Jesus. L. S. Chafer said, "The union of Christ's two natures is so complete that His blood becomes the blood of God." Philips translates, "Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God." He is the one who makes reconciliation.

The Father was pleased through Jesus Christ to reconcile all things to Himself. Only the One in whom all the fullness of God dwells could accomplish reconciliation to a holy God.

"Reconciliation" is a unique word for the apostle Paul. He alone uses it in relation to God's work in Jesus Christ on behalf of sinful men. It is never God being reconciled to man, but always it is sinful man who is reconciled with God. It is man who needs to be reconciled to God. Man chose to disobey God and separate from His ways. However, God is the One who chose to take the initiative to reconcile sinful man through the sacrifice of Christ.

Jesus Christ is God's agent in reconciling sinful man to Himself. None other could ever accomplish such a work. God's agent of reconciliation is holy and righteous. He is sinless and pure.

God has made it possible for sinful man to have a changed relationship with Himself from enmity to friendship. The word "reconcile" suggests the effecting in man a condition of submission and harmony with



friendship. The word “reconcile” suggests the effecting in man a condition of submission and harmony with God. The original language uses a double compound verb meaning to change completely, to change so as to remove all enmity. The emphasis is on the completeness of Christ’s reconciliation.

## **SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

The apostle Paul emphasizes the preexistence of Christ before all creation. That is the great assumption throughout this passage.

The second assumption Paul makes is Christ is at work reconciling the world to God. "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18, NASB95).

A holy God is reaching down to you right now and offers you forgiveness of all your sins and an invitation to come to Him and enter into a perfect relationship with Him.

This passage does not suggest universalism, but a call to come freely and receive God’s offer of eternal life by believing on Christ. There is nothing like the peace that God gives through the blood of His cross.

When God makes reconciliation with man the change takes place in man, not in God. It is the sinner who is turned to God. God is always reaching down to man in love and grace, calling for sinful man to repent and turn to God in faith.

Everything in the Christian life is at stake when we consider the person and work of Jesus Christ. Your response to the question “Who is Jesus Christ?” challenges every professing Christian. It not only determines your eternal destiny, but the quality of your Christian life and testimony. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is *my* Lord. I pray that He is your Lord and Savior, too.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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Title: Colossians 1:13-20 The Incomparable All-sufficient Christ

Series: Colossians

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries for ten years. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist pastor and

Colossians 1:13-20 The Incomparable All-sufficient Christ

missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist pastor and teaches seminary extension courses in Honduras.

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