

“Who Is Jesus?”

Colossians 1

Many people today, like the false teachers at Colosse, will give Jesus Christ a place of eminence, but they will not give Him His rightful place of preeminence. He is not a “great man among great men”; He is God’s Son, preeminent in all things! In this first chapter, the apostle declares Christ’s preeminence in several areas of life.

I. Preeminent in the Gospel Message (1:1–12)

The false teachers had a message, but their message had no power to it. They taught about angels, “emanations” from God, legalistic rules, and bodily disciplines, but their message had no power to transform lives. In these verses Paul reviews the effect the Gospel of Christ had on the Colossians. He had not visited this church personally but had heard from Epaphras the good news of their salvation (vv. 4, 7).

A. How they were saved.

Epaphras apparently had heard the Gospel of Christ from Paul at Ephesus and had taken this life-changing message back to Colosse (v. 7). Witnessing ought to begin at home (Mark 5:19). Epaphras gave them “the word of the truth of the Gospel” (v. 5) in contrast to the lies of the false teachers. Faith comes by hearing; these people heard the Word, believed, and were saved.

B. The evidences of their salvation.

These believers demonstrated faith, hope, and love (vv. 4–5, 8). Only Jesus Christ can give faith, change a selfish heart into a heart of love, and then give a blessed hope for the future. The Word brought forth fruit in their lives (v. 6); fruit is the evidence of true salvation (Matt. 13:23).

C. Paul’s prayer for their growth (vv. 9–12).

Since salvation is a personal experience with Jesus Christ, and not merely the acceptance of a set of doctrines, a believer can experience daily growth and development.

The heretics taught a mystical “fullness” that their followers would gain; but here Paul states that every believer in Christ can be filled. We have been “made full in Him” (2:9–10); now he prays that they might experience this fullness in their daily lives. Note the requests he makes: (1) that they might know His will; (2) that they would walk so as to please God; (3) that they would work to bear fruit; (4) that they would understand the Word better; and (5) that they would know His glorious power. These are things the heretics falsely promised their followers, but these blessings can be found only in Christ. He is preeminent!

II. Preeminent in the Cross (1:13–14)

It is His cross that causes Jesus Christ to stand out head and shoulders above any other person in history. Religious leaders have died, but only Christ, God’s Son, died on the cross for the sins of the world. The picture in these verses is that of a great general setting a nation free from bondage and moving the people into a new land of blessing. What angel ever died to redeem sinners (set them free)? What religious rules ever produced forgiveness? It is the cross that lifts Jesus Christ high above all.

III. Preeminent in Creation (1:15–17)

The Gnostic teachers claimed that God made the worlds through a series of “emanations” from Himself and that Christ was one of these emanations. Paul asserts that Christ is not an emanation from God, but God Himself! “Image” means “the exact reproduction.” Christ is not one of God’s creatures, but the highest (firstborn) of all creation. The term “firstborn” does not refer to time (as though Christ were the first thing God created) but to position. All things were created by Him (see John 1) and for Him; He holds all things together! (“Consist” means “to hold together.”)

IV. Preeminent in the Church (1:18–23)

The church is His body, and He is the Head. The church is the new creation, and He is “the Beginning,” that is, the Originator of the new creation. His resurrection gives Him title to the throne of preeminence, for He is “firstborn” from the dead, that is, first to rise from the dead, never to die again. Note the repetition of the word “all” in this chapter, showing the universal rule of Jesus Christ over everything that exists.

The details of the meaning of “the body” are given in Eph. 2:11ff; this passage describes how Christ made peace between Jews and Gentiles and reconciled both in one body, the church. But His cross not only reconciled Jews and Gentiles; it made possible the reconciliation of “all things”—the entire universe! Paul applies this to the believers personally (vv. 21–23), reminding them that Christ has completely changed their lives and reconciled them to God. The false teachers might spin spider webs of doctrine about angels and “emanations,” but Christ still has preeminence as the Head of the church! He is “the firstborn” of creation (v. 15) and of the dead (v. 18), signifying His priority and sovereignty.

V. Preeminent in Paul’s Ministry (1:24–29)

How foolish it would have been for Paul to suffer for a Christ who was only an “emanation”! Why risk death to tell people that Jesus Christ is not preeminent! Paul’s first words when he saw the glorified Savior were, “Who are You, Lord?” The lordship of Christ—His preeminence over all things—was the heartbeat of Paul’s life and ministry. He looked upon his personal sufferings as suffering for Christ’s sake. In v. 24, Paul is not saying that he suffered as Jesus did or that his suffering was a part of Christ’s suffering on the cross. Rather, he is saying that as Christ suffered for others, so he suffers for others, and his suffering is on behalf of the body, the church. The word for “suffering” here is never the one used for the sufferings of Christ on the cross. It speaks rather of His sufferings during His earthly ministry, sufferings that God’s people experience as they seek to live for Christ in a hostile world.

Paul next described “the mystery”—that truth about Christ and the church that had been hidden in times past but was now revealed (see Eph. 3). Actually, Paul speaks of a three-fold mystery: (1) the mystery of the church, vv. 24–26; (2) of the indwelling Christ, v. 27, and (3) of the Person of Christ, the fullness of God, 2:2–3.

Paul had a balanced ministry: he preached, taught, and warned; he sought to take the truth to all people, not just a few; and his goal was to present each believer mature (perfect) in Christ. Christian perfection is not sinlessness, but maturity—growing up unto Christ in all things (Eph. 4:15). The whole theme of Colossians is “Christ is all you need.”

We are made full in Him, and that is all that is needed! How tragic when Christians substitute man-made rules, disciplines, and rituals for the fullness we have in Christ!

But Paul did not run his ministry by his own power: God worked in him, and then he worked for God. See Phil. 1:12–13 and Eph. 3:20–21.