

- **When Paul wrote letter to Colossians these young believers were being challenged by what theologians call Colossian heresy- the essence being that Christ was not enough. Jesus is great mind you, but if you really want to be right with God, if you really want to experience all the good this life has to offer, well then, Christ Alone isn't going to cut it.**
- **In response Paul writes his letter. He begins by thanking God for the Colossian believers, for their faith, their love, how they truly understood God's Grace- and how the true message of the Gospel was bearing fruit through them... and then...**
- **Paul prays - and this isn't just a perfunctory introductory prayer. He tells them this is his...**

✠ Ongoing prayer

- **...and to set the stage for the INCREDIBLE scripture we will see today, I want us to see this prayer again.**

Colossians 1:9-14 *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.*

- **And now Paul brings his prayer to its apex with an incredible- essential- statement of what God HAS DONE, and by declaring the source, the fullness, and summation, of all He has done.**

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought (transferred, translated) us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- **AND NOW Paul says- in one of his most important statements of everything he ever wrote- LET ME TELL YOU WHO THIS SON IS.**
- **In what follows- verses 15-20, the Apostle pens what may be the New Testaments greatest proclamation of the identity, supremacy, and person of Jesus Christ.**
- **The theological term for what we believe about Jesus is Christology, and in this passage we find Christology's highest expression.**
- **Some scholars think this was a confessional hymn sung by the first generation of Christ followers, continually reminding themselves of the absolute supremacy and majesty of the object of their new faith- even more, the SOURCE of this New Life into which they had been born.**
- **Not that different from us, what these believers proclaimed to be true- and HOW THEY LIVED as a result- was profoundly countercultural. They were surrounded by societal forces seeking to undermine their faith and they faced the constant temptation to grow weary and lose heart. IN RESPONSE, Paul cry's out to them... LOOK TO JESUS! His is your hope! HE IS ENOUGH! HE IS ALL!**

- **JESUS is our life. JESUS is our great confession. Let me tell you the fullness of who JESUS IS.**
- **TURN WITH ME to Colossians 1:15... THIS IS OUR**

✠ ...Great Confession

Colossians 1:15-20 *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

- **Question- WHAT IS Christianity?**
 - **A religion? Set of beliefs about God, history, life, and future?**
 - **Form of spirituality that helps us cope with struggles in life?**
 - **Ethical system- moral standards, moral truth?**
 - **Cultural system, defined by our music, our books, how we dress, our buildings, the way we talk, our holidays?**
 - **Is it a political identity, a religious base for political power?**
- **There are many ways people could describe what Christianity is- and it may include some of what I just said. There are people right now asserting that we are seeing a great struggle for the identity of Christianity in our country, right now. I agree.**
- **BUT CHURCH- whatever we may at first blush say Christianity is, regardless of what our culture around us may say Christianity is, SCRIPTURE PROCLAIMS..**

The defining reality of what Christianity is, is who JESUS is!

- **This is why this passage, and others like it throughout the NT, is so important.**
- **THERE is MUCH NT teaching that describes the nature of Jesus, the character of Jesus. HERE, Paul establishes, in no uncertain terms, the SUPREMACY of Jesus.**
- **He does this by painting a sweeping portrait with three essential themes:**

In this portrait of Christ, we see the essential Truth of:

- **Jesus' supremacy over the FIRST creation**
- **Everything that has been created since the beginning of time.**
- **Jesus' supremacy over His NEW Creation**
- **The NEW CREATION of the NEW COVENANT that began with Christ's death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.**
- **Jesus' supremacy in RECONCILING His creation to God**
- **So, lets explore this. First and foremost, this scripture proclaims that...**

✠ **Jesus is the full, total, flawless revelation of God. Jesus IS God!**

V 15 *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

- **IMAGE** means much more than just ‘resemblance’... old saying of how a child is the ‘spitting image’ of their parent. **LOOKS** like them, but not the same. That’s not what this is.
- Rather, In Jesus there exists the **FULLNESS** of the **PRESENCE** of God. In the opening of His Gospel John says “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”
- Paul isn’t just referring to Jesus as the Physical Jewish man, who lived in Judea 2000 years ago. We will get there, but here Paul speaks of Jesus as the total reality of God from eternity past to eternity future. Before time began, before creation was created, Jesus existed as the fullness of God.
- Likewise, the phrase “firstborn over all creation” doesn’t imply that Jesus is a created being. The rest of the passage makes this clear.
- The concept of ‘firstborn’, both in the OT and in ancient Hebrew culture, signified that the firstborn son held the place of preeminence in the family.
- Paul here is drawing upon OT imagery to describe Jesus as existing fully as God before all creation, and being supreme over all creation, and that all creation is for him.
- The writer of Hebrews opens with this same truth:

Hebrews 1:1-3 *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

- Now Paul takes next step, proclaiming that **AS GOD,**

✠ Jesus is both the **AGENT** and the **SOURCE** of all creation.

Colossians 1:16 *For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*

- **TWO BIG thoughts here. FIRST-** Paul says that **IN CHRIST** all things were created. The word **IN** is important. Creation wasn’t just **BY** Christ, it was **IN CHRIST**. This is a concept hard to wrap our minds around- let me give an image that starts to get there...
- Imagine a person who wants to build their home, and they are telling you about it. They start by saying they are the **ARCHITECT**. From top to bottom, every detail, every square inch is a product of their creative genius and imagination. **THEN**, they say that they are also the builder. Every detail of the design will be carried out, cut, installed, and perfectly placed by them. **YOU SAY, THAT’S IMPRESSIVE!** They say... wait, I’m not done! All the materials for my house, the grounds, every finished material, every raw material, the earth under the house, the sky above the house, the energy used to build and sustain the house, the glue that holds the house together, **EVERY** conceivable and inconceivable thing that went into the house... I made all of that as well. In fact, I didn’t just make all of it, I **AM** all of it.
- This just **STARTS** to point toward the cosmic reality of who Jesus is.
- **2ND big thought-** Paul gets specific, he wants to make sure we understand scope he is describing. **CHRIST** is the creating agent and source of...

things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all

things have been created through him and for him.

- **Paul is describing not just the reality of physical creation, but also of the SPIRITUAL reality. Every Spiritual force, both good and evil, is created by Christ.**
- **So what are the thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities? This describes the reality of Spiritual forces- angels, demons... and systems of power, both good and evil. NT WRIGHT describes this as the “Power structures of the universe”, and this includes the power structures by which the world operates, be it political, economic, or social.**
- **WRIGHT SAYS- “Wherever you look, whatever realities you can think of- EVEN IF they do not acknowledge the fact, owe their very existence to Christ.”**
- **EVEN MORE, Paul says these entities and forces are created FOR HIM. THINK OF THIS! Imagine something absolutely counter to who Jesus is- I’m thinking of denigration and EXPLOITATION of creation, chiefly people.**
- **EVERY PERSON who has ever brought harm, suffering, and denigration to another human being is a creation of Christ. The systems of power they use to carry out their exploitation is a creation of Christ, even though distorted. Their ability to continue to live, even in rebellion against God, is possible because of Christ. Their greatest plans against God and creation will ultimately be used by Christ for His purposes. AND, KEY, the very systems and powers used against Christ and His creation will themselves be reconciled back to God by Christ.**
- **The bottom line... when Paul says ALL THINGS all things have been created through him and for him:**

All things means ALL THINGS!

- **We continue- Jesus isn’t just the source of creation...**

✠ **Jesus is the SUSTAINER of all creation**

Colossians 1:17 *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

- **The tense of the Greek here indicates that ALL THINGS- the totality of creation, was sustained by Christ, and continues to be sustained by Christ. ALL of creation, even those who deny him and even the enemies of God, are dependent upon Christ. Paul stated this succinctly when he spoke to the intellectuals of Athens, all the way back in Acts 17, when he said...**

Acts 17:28a *‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’*

- **To again quote NT Wright... Creation is GOD’S WORK. It is CHRIST’S work. Though spoilt by sin, it still belongs to God, and God has plans for it.**
- **This is an important corrective to the religious fatalism that holds humanity to have no hope, and the sooner Christ puts an end to it the better. This is tantamount to saying to Jesus... “This creation you are sustaining isn’t worth sustaining”.... AND THE JESUS OF SCRIPTURE replies... I BEG TO DIFFER, and I demonstrated this on the CROSS. IN FACT, the new creation you long for, IT HAS ALREADY BEGUN!**
- **I AM already in the process of reconciling my creation back to myself, and my agent of carrying out this New Creation work, my body, my presence, my ambassador in the world now.. is the CHURCH.**
- **This leads to the second big theme of our Great Confession, which is that...**

✠ **Jesus is the head of His New Creation Body, the church.**

Colossians 1:18 *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among*

the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

- **Paul's point is clear and essential. EVERYTHING that has just been said about Jesus... THIS IS THE JESUS that we- believers belong to, and NONE OTHER. THIS IS THE JESUS in whom we live, move, and have out being. THIS IS THE JESUS who began, sustains, and will bring his church to completion.**
- **The word 'BEGINNING' is really insufficient here. More than just the first point in time, the word here speaks of the FIRST PRINCIPLE of the church. THE SOURCE of the church. The CREATIVE INITIATIVE of the church.**
- **That Christ is the 'Firstborn from among the dead' means that Jesus' resurrection, while the first, is not the last. Christ's resurrection was the first of many, and although our physical resurrection is yet to come, our true resurrection, our Spiritual resurrection, IN CHRIST, has already happened. We are NEW CREATIONS NOW, just as God's work of reconciling all of his creation has ALREADY begun- and Paul will spend the rest of his letter unpacking what this means, AND what this looks like, in how we live as New Creation people.**
- **NOW, as Paul moves to the conclusion of this confession, he reiterates that Jesus is the fullness of God. SPECIFICALLY, that....**

✠ **The Jesus we have seen is the fullness of God!**

Colossians 1:19 *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,*

- **This is subtle, but key. In the structure of this poem- for that is what it is- Paul has moved from speaking of the original creation to Jesus' role and supremacy in His NEW Creation. AS WE KNOW, the story of the NEW CREATION began with the INCARNATION of God in Christ. When the WORD was made flesh and came to dwell among us. Jesus' earthly life.**
- **SO, when Paul proclaims the fullness of God was dwelling in Christ, he means that if we really want to see the FULLNESS, The nature and character of WHO GOD IS AND WHAT GOD IS LIKE, we need to look no further than the life, the words, actions, THE LOVE of Jesus as he lived upon this earth. MOST IMPORTANTLY, by looking at Jesus as he endured the cross. (THIS IS NEXT WEEK).**
- **And now Paul brings the confession to a close with this:**

✠ **Jesus is God's agent – the SOURCE- in God's cosmic work of reconciling to Himself ALL THINGS.**

Colossians 1:19-20 *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, AND through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

- **OKAY- this we need to explore just a bit.**
- **Reminder... ALL THINGS means... all things. The entirety of the created order, chiefly the apex of God's created order, humanity. As Paul said in Romans 8, Christ is carrying out the will of God so that "creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God."**
- **SO, what does Paul mean when he says that through Christ, God is reconciling all things to himself? I could ask... If at the end of time as we know it, when the book of revelation has been closed and eternity has been fully ushered in, IF AT THAT TIME ALL THINGS will have been reconciled to God, will there be anything, anyone, who has not been reconciled to**

God? DO YOU SEE THE TENSION THIS MAY CAUSE? This isn't something I'm seeing on my own. ANY commentary you read on Colossians will address this tension. If you're not picking up what I'm throwing down, let's seek to be clear about what this passage- by itself- DOES NOT MEAN... and...

- What this doesn't mean (*and – with great humility- what it does!*)
- **FIRST. This passage is not a gateway to a theology of cheap universal salvation. This is the notion that it doesn't matter what you believe, that Jesus really doesn't matter, that all roads lead to God, and we all (except maybe really bad people) will go to heaven when we die.**
- **This statement IS God's word- and it must be understood through the lens of ALL of God's word.**
- **If the NT is clear about anything, it is clear that Christ alone is humanity's hope to be reconciled to God- to be brought back into a fully restored relationship with God.**
- **Furthermore, the NT proclaims time and again that we receive this New Creation relationship with God- that we receive God's Righteousness as our own- THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST. Just TWO examples:**

Romans 1:16-17 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*

1 John 5:11-13 *And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

- **The GIFT of freedom and new life in Christ is received through the GIFT of FAITH IN CHRIST.**
- **NOW- THAT SAID- we behold here a mystery- a glorious tension- and it is this. YES, God's righteousness is given through faith in Christ to all who believe, a gift to be received by faith. AND, this is a gift that can be refused.**
- **AT THE SAME TIME, when we DO look through the lens of ALL OF GOD'S WORD, we also will see that our understanding of sin, redemption, judgement, and eternal destiny is all contained within the eternally larger mystery that God, IN the FULLNESS OF CHRIST, and the FULLNESS OF ETERNITY, will indeed reconcile to himself all things- and everything needed for this work of reconciliation was accomplished by Christ at the cross.**
- **This DOES NOT reduce the necessity of Christ- far from it! Rather, it shouts out, with hope and joy, the great miracle of the goodness, redemption, sovereignty, the fullness, and supremacy of God and Christ- in ALL THINGS.**

† A few really important takeaways

- In Christ, we are set free from fear!
- **God is sovereign. The next time you think of some geopolitical event or cultural trend and it terrifies you- or you are tempted to think there is no hope for this world, and you find yourself looking at life with fear and anger instead of love and hope... come and read this passage. LOOK TO JESUS.**

- In Christ, we need no other source for life and godliness.
- *We are so easily tempted to compromise who we are in Christ in order to try and meet our needs.*
- *As the church- we are being tempted to compromise the nature of Christ in order to protect our rights, our morality, things that we see to be important and Godly, and good. But this passage calls us to remember- Jesus will never lead us to violate his nature in order to accomplish his purposes. JESUS IS SUFFICIENT. HE IS OUR HOPE. His character is to be our character. His LOVE for us is the way of our love for others, the fruit of HIS Spirit is the expression of our soul... HIS WAY, is always to be our way.*
- Before Christ (*when we behold, consider*), our response will be humility, gratitude, hope, and worship.
- *And Christ in us will lead us to engage the world around us in this same way.*
- *And finally, and of the utmost importance...*
- The answer to the question ‘just who is Jesus’ is also the answer to the question ‘just who is God?’
- *We will explore this essential concept NEXT WEEK*