**The Preeminence of Christ**

**Lesson #1**

(Colossians 1:1-19)

**Background:**

Paul is writing while under house arrest in Rome (around 62 AD). This letter was written during the two-year period when Paul wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (the prison epistles).

The church in Colossae appears to have gotten its start during Paul’s two to three-year ministry in Ephesus (approximately 52-55 AD during the third missionary journey). It appears that during this lengthy ministry in Ephesus, a man named Epaphras traveled from Colossae to Ephesus, heard the gospel, responded by faith to the gospel, and then went back to Colossae. Though his testimony about the person and work of Jesus a church formed where he appears to have become the pastor of this brand-new church.

As you glance at the map, the route seems very similar to the second missionary journey, indeed the goal for this work was to go and “strengthen all the disciples.” But there is one major difference from the second missionary journey. If you remember back to the second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas were “forbidden” by the Holy Spirit to go in Asia and preach the gospel.

*“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.” (Ac 16:6 ESV)*

Here on the Third missionary journey, there is no such hindrance. You can see they go from Cappadocia, into Galatia, and into Asia. This is where Paul preaches in Ephesus for a two-to-three-year period. For reference Colossae is a little over 100 miles from Ephesus.

So Epaphras is converted under Paul’s preaching goes home, as he witnesses about Jesus, people believe, and a church is formed. It is now 5-7 years later, Epaphras learns that Paul is in Rome, under house arrest. He travels to Rome to minister to Paul, to share with him that a church has formed in Colossae, and to tell him about some doctrinal problems that are developing.

The genesis of and reason for the letter to the Colossians is much different than the letter to the Philippians. This letter is born of out of doctrinal errors, errors that at least in part appear to be about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul, who had never met the believers in Colossae writes this letter, as an Apostle of Christ, to address these errors.

But this explains why Colossians is so much different then Philippians, in that it is theologically loaded. As you read it, you will feal like Paul is trying to say as much as possible (theologically) in as few words as possible. **I love this letter!** Finally, this letter is very similar in content with Ephesians, although Ephesians is not focused on correcting any errors, but on sharing the truth.

***1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.***

This is a similar introduction as to what we saw in Philippians.

*“1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Php 1:1-2 ESV)*

But there is one major difference that is important due to the nature of this letter. In Philippians, the letter opens Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ. Colossians opens with, Paul an apostle of Christ, by the will of God, and brother Timothy is with me.

**Saints -** **ἅγιος** (hag’-ee-os) – holy, set apart for God, highlighting what God had done for them.

**Faithful brethren -** highlighting their relationship to one another.

**Grace** -God’s unmerited, undeserved favor

**Peace -** Exemption from rage and havoc, tranquility, safety, security

***3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing —  as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.***

**Vs 3** – as Paul quickly transitions from the salutation and thanks God for the church.

**Vs 4** – Since we heard of your faith and how you love other believers. It is likely that Paul had just learned about the believers in Colossae from Epaphras, but Paul’s point, since: **we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints…**

We have been **praying for you**. We have added you to our list of prayer concerns.

Faith in God and love for believers are the marks of a Christian.

Without faith it is impossible to please God

*“****34*** *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* ***35*** *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."” (Joh 13:34-35 ESV)*

**Vs 5-6 –** Paul reminds the church of the ultimate hope that awaits them (laid up in heaven).

We cannot be sure, but I would suspect that Paul referring here to the gospel as also the Word of Truth, is meant to serve the point that any teaching that veers from the true gospel is not truth, and could negatively impact a person ability to secure the promised future.

This word of truth has come to them, as it has to the **whole world** and **it is bearing fruit and increasing —  as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,** Notice Again, Paul’s focus on truth.

He called the gospel the word of Truth, and now he says that it has been bearing fruit around the known world, like it has in your life, since the day you **heard** and **understood**, the grace of God (in truth).

**Vs 7 –** Notice, the church learned the gospel from Epaphras, who is a beloved fellow servant and also a “faithful minister” of Christ on your behalf.

It seems that Epaphras has traveled from Colossae to Rome! As a crow flies it is over 1100 miles. It would have taken 12-16 weeks for Epaphras to make the trip. We can speculate that this “faithful minister” wanted to minister to Paul, but he also needed Paul’s help with errors that had crept into the church that he had founded.

**Vs 8 –** This same **Epaphras**, is the one **who shared their (the church in Colossae’s love of the truth, love of the gospel, love of Jesus Christ with Paul.**

That is the opening of the letter and set’s the stage for Paul to discuss specifically what he has been praying for, which then turns into a litany of what God had done for them in Christ (we will hold of on that until next week). Which then turns into an outline of the person of Christ and why he and he alone has the place of preeminence.

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***9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12******¶ giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.***

**Vs 9a** – From the day we heard about you, your faith, your love, we have not ceased to pray for you.

The first thing that Paul is praying for them, which as you will see serves as the foundation for the specific goals that he will list. But like a foundation, it is critical:

**Vs 9b -** That they would be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding

**Filled** - **πληρόω** (*play-ro’-o) –* to render full, to be made full, to be overflowing, to abound

**Knowledge -****ἐπίγνωσις** (*ep-ig’-no-sis)* – precise and correct knowledge

**Of his will****θέλημα** (*thel’-ay-mah)* – his will, his purposes, his desire

*Message: 9 Be assured that from the first day we heard of you, we haven’t stopped praying for you,* ***asking God to give you wise minds and spirits attuned to his will, and so acquire a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works.***

It is here, we see what Paul is praying and he explains why. You can see it start in verse 10 “so as to…”

**Vs 10-11** – This knowledge and understanding of the ways in which God works, is not the end unto itself. Knowledge of God’s will and ways are not the final and ultimate goal.

Then Paul lists five things (goals) that he is praying that these believers would receive.

**Goal #1** - That you would walk (shorthand for live and conduct your life) in a manner that is **worthy of the Lord** and **fully pleasing the Lord.**

Our life, our conduct, how we live in this world matters and Paul would encourage us to live our lives in a manner that is worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus and one that would please our Lord!

**Goal #2** – **bearing fruit in every good work -** That they would bear fruit in every good work.

Being fruitful (or bearing fruit) in all good works!

*“22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Ga 5:22-23 ESV)*

**Goal #3** – That **they would increase in the knowledge of God**.

God’s desire was not only for their salvation, but Pauls’ desire was that they would know (intimate knowledge) they one who created and redeemed them.

**Knowledge -****ἐπίγνωσις** (*ep-ig’-no-sis)* – precise and correct knowledge

It is one thing to better understand God’s his will for your life, how this prayer started. It is quite another thing to grow in knowledge of God, who He is, what he is like, what he has done for you.

**Goal #4** - that they would be **strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy**

Paul is praying that they would be (made strong) with all power, according to His (God’s glorious) might and strength for:

**Endurance** – be steadfast

**Patience** – perseverance

**With joy**… By the way all of that coupled with joy.

To summarize, Paul is praying that they would receive God given, divine strength that is needed to be steadfast as believers and persevere in the faith.

***12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.***

**Goal #5** – Giving thanks to the Father. Now Paul could have stopped there. We get it, the final goal of Paul’s prayer is the Colossian believers’ thankfulness to God.

It is at this very point that Paul begins to outline what God has done for us in Christ. We will pick up here in verse 12, next week, and build that list. For today, let’s move on to verse 15 – 20.

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***15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities —  all things were created through him and for him. 17 And 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, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,***

Paul now provides eight reasons why Jesus is the Preeminent One.

**Reason #1 that Jesus is the Preeminent One:** Vs -15 **He is the image of God -** The **(εἰκών)** of God! Invisible is made visible.

The word was used in classical Greek to describe a fire embossed image of a person, for example Ceasar’s (**εἰκών**) was placed on coins. Just as that image was meant to represent Ceasar, Jesus Christ is the perfect representative of God the Father.

Here Jesus is said to be the image of the invisible God. Paul is saying the God who no man has ever seen and lived, Jesus is the perfect representation of the never ever seen GOD!

*John 14:8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. 9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?*

**Reason #2 that Jesus is the Preeminent One: Vs 15 - He is the firstborn of every creature!**

There are a couple of different cults who will run you to this verse, ignore everything around it, and use this verse to attempt to prove that Jesus is not God, but a created being.

In attempting this, they show their ignorance of the Scriptures overall. Equally, they ignore how firstborn is used in the Bible and how Paul uses it in context here in Colossians.

##### First off Paul is referring not to the possibility of Christ being a created being, which all the verses around this point deny, but rather to the incarnation. To the time when God came in the person of Jesus Christ, born of a virgin.

##### This word is highlighting Christ is first in rank, first in importance, or first in preeminence of all who have ever been born of a woman.

*Phil 2:6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:*

*“****14*** *And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn).* ***15*** *And he blessed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day,* ***16*** *the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."* ***17*** *When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head.* ***18*** *And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head."* ***19*** *But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations."” (Ge 48:14-19 ESV)*

So literally, the first-born is (Manasseh).

*“****8*** *Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.* ***9*** *With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.” (Jer 31:8-9 ESV)*

*“****20*** *I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him,* ***21*** *so that my hand shall be established with him; my arm also shall strengthen him.* ***22*** *The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him.* ***23*** *I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.* ***24*** *My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted.* ***25*** *I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.* ***26*** *He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’* ***27*** *And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” (Ps 89:20-27 ESV)*

**Reason #3 that Jesus is the Preeminent One: Vs 16 - He is the creator of all things! 16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities —  all things were created through him and for him.

By Him, or In Him, were all things created!

**Visible, invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers**

But not only created by (en) Him. But notice created (dia) through Him. But not only created by Him, and created through His power, but they were created (eis) for Him. The ultimate purpose of the creation is Christ.

*John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

**Reason #4 that Jesus is the Preeminent One: Vs 17 - He is Before all things!** He is (**πρό**) before or above all things!

The Greek word can be translated before, as in the sense of time or rank, or it can be translated above. **In either case** Paul’s point is clear Jesus stands as the one before in sense of rank and Jesus stands above in the sense of importance.

*John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."*

**Reason #5 that Jesus is the Preeminent One: Vs 17 - By Him all things hold together!**

He is the creator, as well as supporter and sustainer of all things.

Here is Paul’s point. Jesus by **His sovereign power is holding this entire creation** that He made, for His own good pleasure together!

*“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power…” (Heb 1:3 ESV)*

**Reason #6 that Jesus is the Preeminent One: Vs 18 - He is the Head of the Church**

Now Paul has made it clear that in the creation, nothing or no one stands above Jesus, He is the preeminent One!

In Greek writing, the point of the head is that it served as the **source of light and life** for the body. He is the **one who fills the body**. He is the head who rules and directs gives **life to**, and **even preserves the body.**

Thus even in the body, Jesus is the preeminent ONE! Not angels, not even the Father, for the Father has given the son, the name that is above every name and declared the Son to be the head of the church.

**Reason #7 that Jesus is the Preeminent One: Vs 18 - He is the Beginning , the firstborn from the dead!**

Again we see the firstborn, in this case from the dead.

Here it is obvious this word is not being used to describe literal order. Jesus raised people from the dead. Before that, Elijah raised the widow’s son from Zarephath (I Kin 17:17-24) and Elisha raised a boy who had some type of massive headache while working in the field, and then died (II Kin 4:18-37). Also, we read the account of a dead man who was thrown into Elisha’s tomb and he came to life (II Kin 13:20-21).

Jesus is the beginning of those born from the dead. The origin, the starting point and the firstborn (place of preeminence) of all who will ever partake in the resurrection.

**Reason #8 that Jesus is the Preeminent One: Vs 19 - In Him, the fullness of God dwells!**

Now think of what Paul is saying; it is in the man Jesus Christ, that the very fullness of God dwells!

Now there is no way to mess any of this up. **Paul is crystal clear. Jesus is God. In HIM (the man Jesus), the very fullness of God dwelt in bodily form.**

*Col 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*

And as quickly as Paul had shifted from talking about what God accomplished through Christ on our behalf, he now shifts back, having fully described who Jesus is, to pick back up on the work of Jesus!

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