

Colossians 1:15-23

Intro:

--It is very likely that this section was an early hymn or creed that was either quoted or slightly amended by Paul as he addresses this church.

--There are numerous early church sayings mentioned in the Scripture: **1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:8-9; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; Titus 3:4-8.**

--It seems to be broken into two parts: **15-17** being Christ's preeminence in creation and **18-20** Christ's preeminence in redemption.

Verses 15:

--**He is the image of the invisible God.** . . Paul makes it clear, first and foremost, that Jesus Christ is the **image of the invisible God**. This is true for both the pagan Gentile and the orthodox Jew.

--Before the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God's works were evident, but He was not seen clearly. The Incarnation changed things. Now, it was not only what God was doing that was seen. God was no longer veiled. The God of Israel was now seen in an image!

**Saphir (The Compassion of Jesus) "I conclude with a more personal testimony. Perhaps none of you know from experience what it is to live without the knowledge of the Incarnation; what it is to endeavor to realize the incomprehensible, infinite God, without the light and comfort of the Mediator, and how joyous and self-evidencing is the peaceful brightness when Jesus is revealed as the Son of God declaring the Father. I was brought up in my childhood in the synagogue, and was taught that there was One God, infinite, incomprehensible, holy—Spirit; high above us, and omnipresent. Much stress was laid on the unity and unicity of God. But this bare, vague, and abstract Monotheism leaves the mind in darkness, while the heart is chilly and desolate.*

"There was another and better current which then influenced me. It was the national history as recorded in the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, and commemorated in festivals. There I was met by no abstract idea of unicity, but by a loving God, who appeared to Abraham, and spoke to him; who led Israel through the wilderness, and dwelt among them; and often, when I thought of the friendly, kind, concrete, and human way in which the Lord God then appeared unto His people and dealt with them, I wondered why He was not now with us, known, loved, and followed.

"One day I was looking at some books, and the title of one arrested my eye. It was "God becoming Man." The thought went through my mind like a flash of lightning; it thrilled my soul with a most joyous solemnity. 'Ah,' I said, 'this would be the most beautiful thing, if God were to become man, and visit us!' Not many years after I heard about Jesus, and read the Gospels. I felt there the same presence, the same loving, condescending, redeeming, and sanctifying God, that appeared to the Fathers. I felt that here was Jehovah; only that all darkness had disappeared, and that the grand but inconceivable glory here shone upon us in the perfect, peaceful, and holy

*countenance of the Man Christ Jesus. Peniel! I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”**

--The miraculous works the God of Israel did in the OT were done visibly by Christ and *in His own name*. Even the offer of forgiveness was given by Jesus Christ! We see God in Jesus Christ. He is *the image* by which all idolatry is abolished.

--Paul had a personal testimony similar to Adolph Saphir’s.

****2 Corinthians 4:6: For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.****

--That Jesus Christ is the very image of God is taught throughout the Scriptures:

****John 1:18: No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.****

****John 14:9: Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?****

****2 Corinthians 4:4: Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.****

****Hebrews 1:3: Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...****

--It is not that we can know the Father by looking at Jesus, it is that we can only know the Father by looking at Jesus. In Him and Him alone we see God clearly! And He wants us to know the Father!

****Luke 10:22: All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.****

--***the firstborn over all creation.*** . . This does not mean that Jesus is the first created thing as many cults today still claim. It means that Jesus is the highest in authority. He is creation’s cornerstone or point of reference.

****Psalm 89:24-29: But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted. Also I will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers. He shall cry to Me, “You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.” Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him. His seed also I will make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.****

--It will also be evident that Paul is thinking of the Incarnate Christ as the ***firstborn from the dead***—meaning the beginning of God’s new and eternal creation.

Verse 16:

--How is the Incarnate Christ the firstborn over all creation?

--***For by Him all things were created.*** . . It is important to take note that ***all things*** is used five times in this section.

--Paul is making it clear there were no other spiritual intermediaries involved. *The lie of many religions and likely part of the current Colossian heresy*

--The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus is Creator.

John 1:3: *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

1 Corinthians 8:6: *Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*

Ephesians 3:9: *and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.*

Hebrews 1:2: *Has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.*

--Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things, even supernatural beings that we cannot see! ***That are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.***

--It is wild Paul is saying this about a man from Nazareth, who was crucified by Romans about thirty years earlier, and who a number of living people knew and lived with!

--For the redeemed then, the Creator's creation—natural material world or supernatural beings and authorities—should hold no terrors and should be used as good in and of itself, with thanksgiving.

--***All things were created through Him and for Him.*** Everything was not only made by Him, but also for Him. Nothing has purpose in and of itself. All purpose is found in relation to Jesus Christ.

Verse 17:

--Paul goes further and declares. . . ***He is before all things.*** . . . pre-existent. Again, Jesus is not the first created thing. He was eternally one with God as God!

John 1:1-2: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*

--There are two types of beings. Uncreated and created. Unmade and made. Jesus is in the uncreated/unmade circle. Jesus' pre-existence is taught in numerous Scriptures: ***Jn. 8:58, 17:5; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6; Rev. 1:11, 22:13.***

--One commentator put it: "No measure of His existence is possible. At every point of His existence it can be said of Him, He is."

--And Paul says more: ***And in Him all things consist!*** Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the Creator and Sustainer of all things! Because of Him everything continues and coheres to His purposes.

Hebrews 1:1-3: God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high.

--What does this mean for us today? Two things:

1) It means that we are all utterly dependent on God. We would cease to exist the moment He no longer sustained our existence!

Milne (The Message of Heaven and Hell): "Only God exists by virtue of his own power. All other things lack self-existence. They only have what we could term 'God-existence'. That is, they continue to exist only because their existence is continually willed by God."

--So many think God is out there but not involved in their lives unless they allow Him to be. Many assume—actively or passively—they can detach themselves from God. They say to themselves: *I will live my life on my own terms at a distance, call my own shots until I die and I'm forced to face Him—if God is even there.*

--The Bible says that is total unreality. All humanity can do is ignore Him as He sustains us! You cannot live a distance from God. We can only acknowledge or refuse to acknowledge our utter dependence on Him. **What thankfulness and gratitude that should give us!**

2) It means that His purposes cannot be broken, and therefore I cannot be broken, because I am a part of His purposes! He sustains now. He will sustain eternally.

Verse 18:

--***And He is the head of the body, the church. . .*** As the head of the Church—the Church being all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ and are born again from Pentecost till the rapture—Jesus Christ rules over and organizes (**1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 2:10; 1 Peter 3:22**).

--Think of Paul hearing: ***I am Jesus, who you are persecuting.***

--This is important because the Church is not dependent on any human, angel, pope, mother Mary, or so-called saint, etc. False teaching always tries to put another intermediary between Christ and the Church He bought with His own blood. **None are "nicer" or more willing to receive, sustain, bless, or pardon us than our Redeemer!**

--***who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. . .*** Jesus Christ is the beginning of the new creation of God. He was the first to rise from among the dead never to return!

****Romans 6:9: Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.****

--His resurrection life is our destiny.

****Romans 8:29: For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.****

--Christ's position of the firstborn from the dead is repeated in numerous Scriptures: **Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 1:5**. In Jesus Christ alone, when the seed of His earthly body died, the first and finest flower of new creation blossomed! He is our Firstfruits and Forerunner. In Him, we see creation as it is meant to be. Humanity as it is meant to be. Life as it is meant to be.

2 Timothy 1:9-10: *Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purposes and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

--Why was this God's purpose in Christ? ***That in all things He may have the preeminence!***

--What do those words tell us? That the high honor of the Son is the Father's design. His purpose in all creation is to have Jesus Christ preeminent in all things—as He is!

Verses 19-20:

--**(19) *For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.*** . . You will notice that "the Father that" is in italics. It seems to give the sense though. God was pleased to have the ***fullness***—the filled full expression of deity—be at home in Jesus Christ. He and He alone is the One, All-sufficient, Mediator and Image.

--Paul declares this more than explains it. I don't think Paul felt like he understood all of this fully. This was inspiration from the Holy Spirit or revelation from Jesus Christ Himself!

--**(20) *and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*** . . God the Father has reconciled ***all things*** through Jesus Christ. *Not universalism here but atonement as the context clearly shows.*

--***having made peace through the blood of His cross.*** . . He made peace with us—not us with Him. It is the peace of God! *Think of the horrible requirements and devious character of the various false gods and idols!*

--The *word* and not the *work* of reconciliation has been committed to us! ***2 Corinthians 5:18-20: *we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God!****

--How could any sin against an eternal God be dealt with without a sacrifice of eternal worth? Sin can only be reconciled by ***the blood of His cross.***

1 Peter 1:18-19: *knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.*

--Finally, we see that the peace brought in by ***the blood of His cross*** affects all of heaven and earth. Nothing in this life will ever be fixed until Jesus Christ fixes it and everything is broken in some measure until He does!

--If peacemaking had a high cost for Him, no doubt there will be a cost for us as well.

*Stott (The Cross Of Christ): *"If our peace-making is to be modeled on our heavenly Father's, however, we will conclude at once that it is quite different from appeasement. For the peace that God secures is never cheap peace, but always costly. He is indeed the world's preeminent peacemaker, but when he determined on reconciliation with us, his "enemies" who had rebelled against him, he "made peace" through the blood of Christ's cross (Colossians 1:20). To reconcile himself to us, and us to himself, and Jews, Gentiles and other hostile groups to each other, cost him nothing less than the painful shame of the cross. We have no right to expect, therefore, that we will be able to engage in conciliation work at no cost to ourselves, whether our involvement in the dispute is as the offending or offended party, or as a third party anxious to help enemies to become friends again."**

--Or, I will add, in sharing the gospel as ambassadors in the ministry of reconciliation!

Verses 21-23:

--**(21-22)** Paul reminds them of their previous unreconciled state outside of Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel.

--They were **alienated**. . . the Greek word is used two other times in **Eph. 2:12 + 4:18**. Those Scriptures sum up this state of separation as *having no hope and without God in the world + darkened, without the life of God, and blind of heart*.

--People don't just live lovely lives in a friendly world. So many live lonely lives in a cold world that seems unfriendly and purposeless. And eventually, evil, brokenness, and sin touch all lives. When the final sting of this world arrives in death, are we alone?

--They were also **enemies in your mind by wicked works**. . . Sinners desire evil deeds and are hostile to the truth. Men and women are not basically good people who sincerely seek the truth, fairly weigh all the evidence, and bow their lives in total surrender and acknowledgment to the truth. *Unbelief and unrepentance are proof of sin in our innermost being.*

--**yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death**. . . We were all aliens and enemies to God, but what He has done *for us* has become evident *in us*.

--Only at the cross, can we clearly see our sin and His provision.

Romans 8:3: For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.

--Why? Just to forgive us? No! To perfect us!

--**to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight**. . . Our perfection is His final goal.

Jude 24: Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...

--(23) Paul was exhorting these Colossian believers not to be moved away from the gospel and their faith as so many are! There is no moving from the Person, doctrine, or sufficiency of Jesus Christ that makes up the true gospel. *So many are today!*

2 John 9: *Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.*

--The Bible consistently teaches and warns that continuance is a part of valid faith. Not perfection but progress.

--Willful disobedience or profession forces one to question the validity of salvation. This does not result in hardline Lordship salvation (Those folks wouldn't have called Lot a righteous man or put Samson in Hebrews 11 for his true faith!). It simply leaves the issue where the Bible does—in question!

--The point is that the individual living in willful disobedient sin or willful false profession *cannot know* if they are saved. I believe that God wants it that way. *I can't know if they are saved and neither can they!*

1 John 2:3-4: *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him.*

--*of which I, Paul, became a minister.* . . . Paul attached his very life to the same gospel Epaphras preached to them and was being preached by the apostles everywhere in the world.