

The Supreme Question Of Life

Note: The following are "notes" from a sermon.

On October 1, 2001, in the Washington Post, an article appeared about a new church in the state of Maryland. (It was actually an established Episcopal church going off the deep end.)

Using market research and focus groups, this denomination had designed weekly services that deliberately deemphasize Jesus Christ.

One of the founders of the church said, "*The sad fact is the name of Jesus Christ has become for many people exclusionary.*"

Using Hindu and Zen, intermingled with a few verses from the Bible and recorded music by Willie Nelson, the leader of this group is quoted as saying, "*We're enabling people to discover God themselves, maybe through Jesus, maybe through Buddha, maybe through any number of ways.*"

Most of us are appalled by this slander of Christianity -- and we should be.

But before we come down too hard on them, I want to address a very dangerous and deadly disease running rampant in many churches today.

At first glance it seems pretty harmless but its spores can infect an entire community.

No, I'm not talking about anthrax. I call this malady "*the virus of practicality*" -- and I've been guilty of spreading it.

Here's how it works. Instead of calling people to faith, repentance and submission to the supremacy of Christ, many of us tell people that Jesus wants to give them a happy marriage or a stress-free life.

While Jesus will certainly change our lives, our marriages, and our stress levels when we bow before His preeminence, we must move away from "*What Jesus can do for me*" to "*Am I living in light of His lordship?*"

We don't simply "*add*" Jesus to our lives; we adore Him with our lives through our obedience.

That brings us to our text in Colossians.

Much of the false teaching taking place in Colosse had to do with the minimizing of Jesus.

Many people thought He was important but not essential.

They had given Him a place in their lives, without recognizing that He

demands first place.

Jesus was prominent to them, but certainly not preeminent.

Paul refutes three misconceptions in Colossians 1:

- 1.** The false teachers taught that God did not create the world because in their view matter was evil and God cannot create evil.
- 2.** Believing that matter was evil, they argued that God would not have come to earth as a human in bodily form.
- 3.** They did not believe that Christ was the unique Son of God but rather one of many intermediaries between God and people.

As we study Colossians 1, beginning with verse 15, we come to the pinnacle of Christianity.

In Jesus, God's complete and perfect revelation is fully revealed.

Our passage breaks into two natural sections with the last part of verse 18 providing the overriding theme: "...*that in all things He may have the preeminence.*"

The preeminence of Jesus over creation (15-17).

The preeminence of Jesus over His new creation (18-23).

Jesus is paramount over everything that He has created in verses 15-17 - and He's preeminent over all that He has redeemed in verses 18-23.

Another way to say it is that He has first place over both the cosmos and the church.

He is Lord of everything He has made, and He is Lord over everyone He has saved.

The Supremacy of Jesus Over Creation.

This passage is one of the strongest in Scripture as it relates to the superiority of Jesus Christ.

Verses 15-17: "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*"

WE SEE 4 TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS IN THESE VERSES:

1. He is God (15a).

Paul doesn't mince any words here. Jesus "*is the image of the invisible*

God.”

Images convey meaning way beyond what words can describe. A wedding band represents the fact that you are married. When we see the Statue of Liberty, something unexplainable takes place deep inside for most people. And today, perhaps more than ever, the image of the American Flag flying over Ground Zero ignites feelings of patriotism, sadness, and maybe even anger in our hearts.

But as powerful as these symbols are, they are simply representations of far deeper realities. Our ring doesn't make us married. Rather, it's a symbol that we are married. The Statue of Liberty doesn't in and of itself do anything. It stands for a nation that honors freedom. The American flag is a powerful national symbol but it only represents what our country is all about.

Note carefully: Jesus is not just a symbol of God; He is God Himself.

The word "image" in Greek is "eikon" and refers to "likeness, manifestation, or replica."

In that culture the "image" was a die or stamp that was able to make exact reproductions.

Passports in Paul's day had a section called "eikon," or "distinguishing marks," which described something about the person that set him apart from everyone else.

Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. He is the precise copy, because He is God Himself. He both represents and manifests God to the world.

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

That phrase "declared Him," means that Jesus literally shows to the world what God the Father is really like.

In John 14:9, Jesus revealed this about Himself: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

In a parallel passage, Hebrews 1:3 says the Son is "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person."

2 Corinthians 4:4 also refers to Christ as the "image of God."

Someone has said that Jesus is God with skin on. That's a pretty good word picture.

2. He is the unique Son of God (15b).

Jesus is not only God; He is the "firstborn over all creation."

Some believe that this verse teaches that Jesus was a created being and therefore not God. Actually, the phrase "*firstborn*" is most frequently translated as "*heir*" or "*owner*."

In ancient times it meant the "*ranking one*," or "*supreme one*." Jacob was not born first but he was the heir.

This is strongly supported in Psalm 89:27 where we read that God appointed King David as his "*firstborn*," even though he was the youngest of eight brothers. This verse concludes by saying that David will be the "*most exalted of the kings of the earth*."

"*Firstborn*" therefore is a title of honor or position, not chronological order.

3. He is the creator of all things (16).

Jesus is the image of God and the exalted one over all creation because He is the Creator.

Lest anyone misunderstand what "*firstborn*" means, in verse 16 Paul explains that all things were created in, through, and for Christ: "*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*"

Jesus is not a mere man. He is the creator of all things -- those things we can see and those things we cannot see.

The context of Colossians 1 declares that Jesus is the Sovereign creator, not one who was Himself created.

Because the false teachers taught that the physical world was evil, they thought that God Himself could not have created it.

They reasoned that if Christ were God, He would be in charge of only the spiritual world.

But Paul explained that all the thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers in heaven and on earth, of both the visible and invisible world, are under the authority of Christ because He created them.

Since the Colossians gave undue prominence to angels, Paul here quickly puts everything under the rule of Christ. Jesus has no rival.

This verse also refutes the false teaching that Christ was one of many intermediaries and that angels were to be worshiped.

The highest angelic princes are subject to Jesus Christ, whether they be seraphim or cherubim, or whether they be demons or Satan himself. Jesus is Lord of all.

Jesus is not only the creator; He provides the purpose for His creation: "*all things were created by Him and for Him.*"

4. He Holds All Things Together (17).

Verse 17: "*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*" (ESV)

Jesus existed before everything else, as He declared in John 8:58: "*Before Abraham was born, I am.*"

To "*hold together*" means to prevent something from falling into complete chaos.

Christ is before all things, both in time and rank. He is not only the Creator of the world; He is the cohesion that keeps it all together.

By Him everything came to be, and by Him everything continues to be.

Hebrews 1:3 reminds us that He holds everything together by His powerful word.

If He were to remove His sustaining power, everything would dissolve into disorder.