

COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 1:15-20 (b)

Lesson #4

Introduction

Last week we began our study of these particular words of holy scripture that speak of the preeminent position of Jesus Christ, both in his place of authority over life and all tangible matter, and his place as firstborn over all things in the heart of God the father.

There are several places in the scriptures that tell us that God created the universe and all living things, and then go on to say that He did that through the agency of his Son Jesus. These scriptures that we're studying now tell us that God brought everything into existence that does exist, both by Jesus and ultimately for Jesus. It's been God the father's intention from before his creation to make something as a love gift for his Son. The cosmos, and all living things in it, are part of that love gift of God to his Son Jesus. The trees think that he did it for trees, the animals think that he did it for animals, the fish think that he did it for fish, and men think that he did it for men; but the bible, which is the very word of God says that he did it for his Son Jesus. And the trees, the animals, the fish, and the men, were all made specifically to be pleasing to Him in their own respective manners. It is first and foremost for Him that all things exist. (V. 16)

I admit that for the present time, not everything and everyone knows and believes this. As the highest order of life form on earth, the vast majority of humans believe that man is the centerpiece of creation, or evolution as some claim. We are indignant if someone suggests that there's a higher authority, or greater purpose, because such a thought carries with it the obvious and inescapable reality that, if so, we aren't autonomous and free to do as we please, but are all subject to the authority of some higher power. And here lies the rub, we all know who that power is. We have many names for Him and many concepts about Him, but we all know that if He created us, then He has the right and authority over us to set his own rules and boundaries for us. And we just won't tolerate this of our own free will.

Even the wisest of men will claim that they actually believe that the whole cosmos, and all living things in it, all just happened by themselves through random chance. They'll look you in the eye and swear they really believe this, when it's patently absurd, even to a school child. Actually believing this is far beyond what any rational mind can possibly do, and on the final judgement day all who have claimed this will admit that they really knew better in their hearts. But, the heart of man is so proud, and so hard against God that he will stand like a little child and stubbornly refuse the inevitable as long as he can, rather than submit himself voluntarily to his father's authority. Even though he knows without a doubt that his is a lost cause, and he will answer eventually for his stubborn disobedience. But in the meantime he goes right on laughing in the face of authority while knowing full well in his heart that there will eventually come a day of reckoning; just as long as it's not today. (Gal 6:7-8)

But, even worse than these staunch unbelievers, as they claim to be, is the attitude of the vast majority of those who claim to be believers. Those who claim the name of Jesus, and expect all the benefits it affords, and yet have never developed any of those fruits of regeneration that the scriptures assign to all who have been born again of the Spirit of God.

This is a wide and diverse group. It includes those who have no interest in the things of God, but choose to perceive Him as a good God who would never send them to such a place as hell. After all, they're not so bad really, when compared to the really worst of mankind.

Then there's the group who "came forward" after an emotionally moving sermon, and were assured by the preacher that they were born again and should never doubt it, even if their lives were not changed afterwards. Or maybe they were changed for a short while, but it simply faded away as time went on. (Mat 13:3-8) Some of these still go to church on Sunday, some don't bother, but they confidently call themselves Christians, and hold to the hope of salvation because of an event that happened sometime back in their life.

Then there's that strange little group that was radically changed by something different. It wasn't by an emotional event, though it probably produced an emotional response itself. In fact, it seemed to happen by a mysterious internal prompting that we didn't instigate on our own. Though we did then, of our own will, freely respond in favor.

But the difference is that after that time there began a lasting and recognizable change of desires; of likes and dislikes, of priorities and behaviors that didn't fade away. The desire to read and learn the scriptures, and a high regard for them, and a trust in their truth and authority developed within the hearts and minds of these ones. A willingness, even eagerness, to subject themselves to those scriptures, without arguing or disputing, even when they are diametrically opposed to what we used to think ourselves, and the rest of the world still believes.

This is clearly a very small group within the broader group that calls itself Christianity, and admittedly not a very popular one at that. Matthew chapter 25 recounts a parable told by Jesus about 10 women (called virgins) who all believed themselves to be brides in waiting, but when the time came for the event, half of them found out they weren't to be included in that glorious event at all. They were unprepared and should have known it, but they were willingly self-deceived.

Likewise, it is this small and unpopular, group within a group, that the Father has chosen from before creation to present to his Son as an eternal mate, a bride as she's called, and to be His own family of eternal worshipers. Many indeed are called by the invitation of the scriptures, but few indeed are chosen by God as His elect. (Mat 22:14) Any view of life, creation, existence, or eternity, must be framed within this divine reality that all things that are, that exist, were made by Him and specifically for Him, and He is before all things whatsoever. Both chronologically and authoritatively, He is preeminent, which is the main point being pressed so precisely by these passages of scriptures that we're studying. Therefore, with this in mind, let's continue with their careful examination.

Part 2

THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST **(In the Master Plan of God)**

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions 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 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Col 1:15-20 (NASB)

Last week we finished our discussion of verse 15 and the first parts of verse 16, but we didn't quite finish 16, so we'll pick up now where we left off.

Verse 16c:

all things have been created through Him and for Him.

This is a repeat of the same thing just said in the first part of the same verse that "by Him all things were created." And we took a very serious look at just what all that meant in the first lesson. But this statement goes a little farther. The first part tells us the **source** of all things in existence, this part tells us the **purpose** of all things in existence. This verse says in plain language that can't be mistaken, that everything that is, has been created specifically for Jesus Christ. Meaning that everything that is works its predetermined part in the plan of creation for the ultimate and final glory of God through his Son Christ Jesus. Everything, in its own predetermined way, displays the glory of God. (Rom 9:9-24)

9 For this is the statement of the promise: At this time I will come, and Sarah will have a son. 10 And not only that, but also when Rebekah became pregnant by Isaac our forefather 11 (for though they had not been born yet or done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to election might stand, 12 not from works but from the One who calls) she was told: The older will serve the younger. 13 As it is written: Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.

14 What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! 15 For He tells Moses: I will show mercy to whom I show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. 16 So then, it does not depend on human will or effort, but on God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture tells Pharaoh: For this reason I raised you up: so that I may display My power in you, **and that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth.** 18 So then, He shows mercy to whom He wills, and He hardens whom He wills.

19 You will say to me, therefore, "Why then does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?" 20 But who are you—anyone who talks back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" 21 Or has the potter no right over His clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor? 22 And what if God, **desiring to display His wrath and to make His power known**, endured with much patience objects of wrath ready for destruction? 23 And [what if] **He did this to make known the riches of His glory on objects of mercy** that He prepared beforehand for glory— 24 on us whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Romans 9:9-24 (HCSB)

These verses we've just read out of Romans are perhaps the most stark and unmistakable demonstration of the meaning of the verses in Colossians that we've now examining. All things, and all people, and all animals, and everything else, were created with a particular purpose in mind, and that purpose was for the ultimate display of the glory of God through his Son Jesus Christ. These were made **by** Him and **for** Him, and He is master and ruler over them, all of them. And He will display his glory through them, each in the manner that He's predetermined. Some by the display of His infinite mercy, and some by the display of His infinite power of judgement. He made both vessels with full intent and sovereign

authority for the purpose of displaying the broad range and multifaceted aspects of His glory. He displays His mercy, and He displays His wrath. For this all things exist and were created. (v.16c)

I know that those who comprehend the biblical doctrines of grace, and the fundamental reformed theology, already know this very well. And, I also know, that those who don't yet understand these biblical truths will be appalled at what they will perceive as such an arbitrary and unfair action by God. Doesn't God have an obligation to everyone to give them an equal portion? How can He be righteous, and at the same time intentionally create some who will be used to display His wrath? Was God fair to Moses but unfair to Pharaoh? (Do we evaluate God? By what standard?)

Now there are whole books written on this subject, and its been the topic of debates throughout church history, and as such we can't thoroughly and exhaustively deal with this in the scope of this study, but this is what the scriptures teach and has been recognized as such by the great church theologians from the very beginning. Submission to the Lordship of Christ includes accepting at face value all that He taught and all that's been presented to us in the holy scriptures. And that the scriptures teach that God has created all things through Christ specifically for his own purposes is simply beyond debate.

You may understand or not understand, you may agree or disagree with the fairness of God, but in the final analysis of the meaning of the verses, it is what it is. The revelation of scriptures is that creation is not about how many people God can persuade to believe and be saved, but rather the display of His glory by both those who do and those who don't. The one group to display the glory of His mercy, and the other group to display the glory of His wrath, as we just read in Romans chapter nine, and is now being reaffirmed in these verses in Colossians one. And this now moves us into the next verse:

Verse 17a

17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together

This next statement is simply the continuation of the same thought that we've been discussing. That He is the creator of all things and they were all made for Him. Therefore He is before all things. Now there's some debate as to whether this is speaking chronologically or positionally, but that shouldn't be hard to determine.

Let's say it is speaking chronologically. Then we're being told that the same one who created everything, existed himself before the things that He created. Now this is certainly true without question. This is truly axiomatic. It is self evident. What great truth does this convey if that 's what we're being told here? That Jesus existed himself before the things that he created. This is obviously not a divine revelation of mystery is it? While it certainly is true, it has no meaning or purpose, but is simply a statement of obvious fact that none will find revelational. It tells us nothing that we don't already know.

On the other hand, if this statement is speaking of His position of authority over all creation, now that is something revelational. That's the official declaration of the preeminence of Christ in the eternal plan of God the Father. This has considerable meaning and does ascribe undisputed authority to Jesus in the kingdom of God. And therefore it's only sensible to take this verse in this manner, that Christ is before all things in position and authority, even though the other is also true as well.

But much more can legitimately be inferred from this verse than Christ's position over tangible matter and other life forms. We are told that the Father loves the Son and that the Son loves the Father.

35 "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.

John 3:35

19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. 20 "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. 21 "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. 22 "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

John 5:19-23

22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. 24 "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

25 "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26 and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

John 17:22-26

Christ's position of preeminence also extends to the heart and affection of his Father. **God's first love is his Son,** and everything is made for His glory and His enjoyment. Every tree, every fish, every bird, every animal, every man, and every angel, has been created by Him and for His good pleasure. Even though not everything will remain permanently. In fact there will be a new heaven and a new earth, because these first ones will pass away as described in Revelation chapter 21, and only that which is pure and holy will remain in the new eternal kingdom of Christ and God, with His elect children, whom, like Christ, He has known by name, and also loved, from before the foundation of the world. (Jn 17:24)

Further considering the place of Christ in the heart of God, and affirming that place, God has determined that the final disposition of all mankind rests solely and entirely on their either believing and submitting to His Son or not. This is the single hinge point of salvation. Those who do are the saved, and those who do not are the condemned. So that His Son will receive the honor He is due among mankind, God has placed His Son's name above every name, and has determined that anyone who wishes to honor Him, the Father, may only do so through acknowledgment of His Son Jesus.

He will accept no other method of honor or worship. To honor the Father, one Must also honor the Son. (Jn 5:23) Jesus Christ is the first and foremost priority in the heart, and mind, and passion, of God the Father. If we learn and remember anything from these verses, let it be this particular fact. There is no discussion of source, or purpose, or outcome of anything in creation or eternity, that doesn't entirely revolve around how it plays into the final and eventual glory of Jesus Christ and God the Father. All that is, is by His grace, and all that is, is for His glory.

Verse 17b

17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together

This is an enlightening statement. Its saying that this creation of God, through Jesus Christ, is not a self sustaining object, or more accurately, group of objects. It's not like some have suggested that God made the universe and then went on a vacation somewhere and left it on its own. This statement is saying that the whole of creation is continually being held in cohesion by the same power that made it in the first place. It isn't self sustaining or self sufficient.

The Greek word used here is translated different ways in different versions, but the fact being conveyed is not in question. This word is also used as commending something, or demonstrating something, and that's exactly what the creation is doing. It's all being held cohesive, in perfect balance and order, as a visible and undeniable demonstration of God's existence and His omnipotent power. (Rom 1:19-20)

Were God to cease His constant maintenance for so much as a millisecond, the creation would immediately disappear. The creation itself, with everything and every person in it, is an ongoing visible demonstration of the existence, power, majesty, mercy, and glory of almighty God. Neither we ourselves, nor the cosmos in which we live, are either self existent or even self sustaining. By the sustaining grace of God alone all things are held together into cohesive tangible existence, including every one of us who are alive, believers and unbelievers alike. Only an ignorant fool thinks he can live a life apart from God. Not one molecule of matter in this universe would stay together, or even remain in existence, apart from the constant sustaining power that holds it together and keeps it in tangible existence.

To sum this up. The one who made all things, is the same one who constantly sustains those things. If you turn off a light in your house in the middle of the night it immediately becomes dark. The light doesn't sustain itself unless it is constantly turned on and electricity is running through the lamp. This whole universe is like a light being held on by the flow of power from the one and only self existent source. You can't turn it off and still have the light.

Another example of this same principle is gravity. This whole universe, and every solar system in it, is held in its position by an unexplained force that we've named gravity. But we don't know what gravity is or how it works. We don't understand how it works on all types of matter. We've discovered a little about magnetism, but it only influences metallic objects for some reason. But gravity is a force that defies all logical examination. Objects on the surface of a spinning sphere, right here on this earth, will immediately fly off of that spinning sphere. Like a dog shakes water off his coat. But, at the very same time our own planet earth is rotating at about a thousand miles per hour at the surface and we don't fly off into the air. Why is that? That defies all logic. The laws of physics say that we should all be flung off the surface of the earth by its rotation, but we aren't. So we invent a name for this mysterious and invisible force, called gravity. But we can't explain it and we don't understand it. However, we do understand that if gravity were to cease, even for a second, then the whole universe would instantly begin to fly apart into total chaos. And this is but one of an unknown number of visible yet unexplainable examples of the continuous sustaining grace of almighty God.

Who was that famous philosopher who claimed that God is dead? What a childish fool he shows himself to be. If God were dead then he himself wouldn't be here to tell it, let alone write it in a book. How do we know for sure that God is? Very simple, if we are, then He is. So then, the important thing that we're being told in this verse is that our very moment to moment existence is being sustained by the ongoing grace of God through Jesus Christ the Lord.

It's interesting that the people who fully understand that they can't take their electric lamp from their living room out into the forest where there's no electricity and get it to light up, are the very same people who think that we can unplug creation from it's source of power and it will keep right on working anyway somehow. It seems that otherwise rational and intelligent mankind somehow abandons all rationality when something involves the acknowledgment of God. But if a lamp is shining then it must be plugged in to some source of power, and if creation is being held together then it must likewise be connected to some source of power that's doing that. It is logically and scientifically irrational to think otherwise.

It's like a stubborn little child who staunchly refuses to accept the most blatantly obvious facts regardless of the consequences. The majority of mankind, like those stubborn little children, will knowingly endure the eternal wrath of God tomorrow, rather than bow in subjection to Him today. The obvious, undeniable, sustaining grace of God that holds the entire universe together, and affords mankind moment to moment life and breath, renders all humanity accountable to God, and eliminates any credible excuse that they didn't really believe there is a God. (Rom 1:19-20) Evolution isn't a scientific conclusion from an unbiased examination of evidence, it's a stubborn childish refusal to accept the blatantly obvious. And its doubtful that any who hold to it don't know that in their hearts, though they'll die before they admit it.

Like the light that immediately goes dark when unplugged from its constant source, so is this universe and all life it contains apart from the constant sustaining grace of God, and this is what we're being told right here in this short and simple sentence in Colossians 1:17. As you draw your next breath, you can thank God for that breath, and for your own life that He's knowingly and purposefully sustaining moment by moment. To Him be all glory, forever.

Robert Andrews
Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
08/14/08