

# COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

## Colossians 1:15-20 (c)

### Lesson #5

#### Introduction & Review

Last week we finished verse 17, but I still feel like there's a lot that hasn't been said that could and should have been said in these first three verses, 15-17. So I'm going to try to finish that up in this combination introduction and review before we move on to the next verse.

We discussed that verse 15 begins with the statement that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. And by that it means that Jesus is everything that God is, in his nature, character, righteousness, and holiness, but He also has a tangible component that the Father doesn't, a body. It further states that Jesus holds the position as firstborn. Which is the bible's way of saying that He is the designated person of authority over all that his Father has. God has placed all His own fullness in His Son, and put all His possessions under His authority. Therefore, there is no means of communication, or transactions of business with God, that doesn't come through His Son Jesus. The Father has made His Son the sole and only recognized mediator between Himself and all of humanity. (1 Tim 2:5) Any disregard, or worse, any disrespect, for Jesus is regarded by God as a direct insult on Himself, as His Son is His designated representative and mediator, and he attained that position at a considerable cost to Himself and His Father.

Jesus is that part of the triune God that mankind may see and touch and know like we know each other. He gives the invisible Father the tangible means to interact with humanity at a level that's not possible without physical being. Without Jesus, our entire relationship with the Father would be on a purely spiritual level. Not that this is bad, but God didn't desire to leave it simply at that, but created tangible matter for the purpose of further augmenting the means for He and His creatures to eternally relate.

It's kind of like the difference between reading about a place in a book and actually going there yourself. We could, for ever be comforted by hearing of the marvelous virtues of God, but, He has chosen rather to show us Himself tangibly in person, through His Son whom we can see and touch and know. This is the Jesus of the bible. Any religious system that doesn't have this at its core, doesn't have any relationship to the God that's described in the bible. I know that there's many other books that men refer to for religious guidance, but there's only one I know of that plainly states, regarding itself, that it is the inerrant inspired words of almighty God. (1 Tim 3:16) If you trust in another, you do so at your own risk.

Then, we discussed that verse (v.16) that unreservedly declares that all things that exist, visible or invisible, powers or authorities, earthly or heavenly, positions of authority (whether good or bad) all were created both by Him and for Him, because, He has a predetermined purpose for everything that exists. That's what it means when it says that everything is FOR Him. We think that tragedies and evils that occur are against Him, but in fact they are all part of the process that ultimately works out for the good of those who love God. Who would argue that the highest evil in the universe, the murder of Jesus, was not a horrible evil that worked out for the good of all those who love God? He has a purpose for good, and He has a purpose for evil, and both exist by His own sovereign design to accomplish His inevitable eternal result. The greatest evil ever perpetrated by mankind, under the influence of Satan, was knowingly and intentionally used by God as the background circumstances through which He might demonstrate the greatest mercy ever seen in the universe.

The scriptures tell us not to look at these temporary things that are happening on this earth in this age, but to look at the eternal things that will be the final result of these things. Remember Jesus' response to Peter when he rebuked Him for saying He would be crucified? He told Peter that he was being a stumbling block to Him because he was evaluating things based on their earthly appearance to men, and not on their eternal significance to God. (Mat 16:23; Mk 8:33) Of course, Peter couldn't possibly have known their eternal significance, but he certainly could have and should have, by that time, learned to trust that the Lord knew what He was doing, even if it seemed impossible to himself.

Peter obviously thought, how could it possibly serve man's or God's interests for Jesus to be brutally murdered? Not an unreasonable question given what Peter knew at the time, but an important lesson to all of us to trust the Lord's words when He speaks. Even when what He says is totally contrary to what we think is the best. We, as humans, cannot seem to ever get our focus off of this temporal and human centered life, and really trust the words of our Lord that all things will work out for the good of those who love God. (Rom 8:28) Because, all too often, they will look just the opposite in the short term. This is precisely why the scriptures record this incident, so that we may learn this important lesson.

We continually hear people, and even some who claim to be Christians, ask how a loving God can allow so much tragedy and evil in the world. Let me shock you a little. He not only allows it, He has predestined it Himself to play a vital

part in His master creation plan. Let me use the scriptures to prove this so you don't think it's just my own opinion. Quoting now from Isaiah chapter 45:

*5 "I am the Lord, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; 6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other, 7 The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these [things].* Isaiah 45:5-7 (NASB)

As I work through these verses regarding the preeminence of Christ in the plan and heart of God, I can't help but be reminded of one of the most memorable statements I've ever read regarding the absolute sovereignty of God over all that exists. I'd like to read a quotation from Arthur W. Pink taken from his book "The Attributes of God" because it so clearly and succinctly sums up what I'm trying to teach.

*"Men imagine that the Most High is moved by sentiment, rather than actuated by principle. They suppose that His omnipotency is such an idle fiction that Satan is thwarting His designs on every side. They think that if He has formed any plan or purpose at all, then it must be like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power He posses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man's "free will" and reduce him to a "machine." They lower the all-efficacious atonement, which has actually redeemed everyone for whom it was made, to a mere "remedy," which sin sick souls may use if they feel disposed to; and they enervate the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an "offer" of the gospel which sinners may accept or reject as they please.*

*The "god" of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle [resemble] the glory of the midday sun. The "god" that is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in the so-called Bible Conferences is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form "gods" out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a "god" out of their own carnal mind. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A "god" whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, posses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object for worship, merits nought but contempt."*

After reading those words of Arthur Pink I don't know what else I could say that would add anything to the matter. So now lets continue in our study of Colossians chapter one which we've titled:

Part 3  
**THE PREMINENCE 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)

**Verse 18a:**

*18 He is also head of the body, the church;*

So far we've been told that He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn over His Father's possessions. He is the One who created all things and is the One for whom all those things were created. He is positionally before all things in His authority, and He is the one who is constantly holding all those things together in their order and existence.

So now we're being told that He is also the head of some type of body. Again, the head is symbolically speaking of His position of authority over this body. What body is He head over? Well the scriptures say that the body that He's head over is called the church. But isn't this a little redundant? We've just been told that He created all things, including rulers and authorities, powers and dominions, visible and invisible; so wouldn't that obviously include the church as well?

Certainly it does. But isn't it interesting that the church gets mentioned by name in this short list of specific things over which Christ is the designated leader? The broad scope of His authority clearly captures everything existent, but then the church gets a specific mention as being something that's under His headship, His direct leadership and authority. If nothing else, this tells us where the church lies in His list of important possessions, by it's specific mention within this broader scope of creation. When the scriptures speak here of the whole of creation, and the preeminence of Christ over it, the church is singled out for specific recognition among all those things.

The verse then goes right on with this specific thought. It says that He's the firstborn from the dead. What's this telling us? Well, Jesus was crucified for the express purpose of providing that absolutely essential atonement for sins that made this specific body possible in the first place. I cannot shrink back from further stating, as did Arthur Pink in the quotation that we read, that this crucifixion was entirely 100% efficacious for every single one for whom it was predetermined and intended. It was not just an open "offer" of something to whomever might or might not wish to take it.

For years my concept of the church was that it was a rather nebulous and nondescript theoretical group that was always in transition and would never be actually and specifically defined until the return of the Lord Jesus. My idea was that people were kind of floating in and out on a hour by hour basis, and it was more like a mysterious vapor than a solid rock. When I read about the church in the scriptures I thought of it not as a complete and fixed specific group, chosen and unchangeable from before creation, but as a conceptual entity in general, and having no real and definable boundaries or specific entities as yet, because I thought it was still being determined day by day. This is actually the most popular concept of our day, it seems logical to us based on what we think we know, but there is no possible way to get this idea from the scriptures. It has to be taught to us early in our Christian life, before we have time to learn the scriptures on our own, and then constantly reinforced by others with this same human misconception. Which is exactly what's going on in vast numbers of churches.

I recently received a CD disc with a message from a very well respected preacher in our denomination telling us to resist any such teachings as this, as it was heresy, and would destroy the churches. Now I don't doubt his motives, but isn't it a crying shame that a well respected preacher and church pastor could go so long in his Christian life and still be so tragically deceived. And yet he's among the majority in this day and age. However, this very same denomination that he has served for so long was literally founded upon this very set of core doctrines, and defended them honorably and effectively for decades against the inevitable liberal onslaught. To be balanced, there are still many faithful preachers in this same denomination who know the truth and openly defend it honorably to this day. May the Lord bless these faithful pastors and men, who demonstrate great courage and wisdom. But to continue on this issue of the church, the bride of Christ, chosen from eternity past by God the Father according to the teachings of scriptures, let me say this:

When Jesus gave up His life on that cross, both He and His Father knew the specific names of each and every human being who was being saved by it; past, present, and future. (Eph 1:4-5; 1 Pet 1:2; Rev 13:8, 17:8) And, by logical extension, that means that he also knew those who would not be saved by His forthcoming crucifixion. Unlike what I myself had been taught for nearly 20 years, that this act was a general purpose offer being made available to none specifically, but to all generally. And the names of those who would choose to respond would be filled in as time went by and people made their own free will choices. I taught this concept myself, which I now admit to my own shame and ignorance. I don't wish to offer any defense, but if I hadn't been taught this as an early believer, I could never have come up with such an idea from reading the Holy Scriptures myself. And it was the systematic study of those same scriptures, along with the sound teachings of faithful and knowledgeable preachers, that revealed to me my error, by the manifold grace of God, and the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

The point of this is that as the head of this body, the church, Jesus Christ chose to willingly forfeit His own life and dignity, temporarily, to establish her, and qualify her as His own mate and His Father's eternal worshipers. And He did this with full knowledge of who she is specifically, not just generally. Let's be honest, if salvation were based entirely on the uninfluenced free will of man, apart from any effectual impetus from God, then it would have been possible, theoretically at least, that Jesus might have died for absolutely nobody; because the scriptures frankly state that there is none who seek after God, not even one. (Rom 3:10-12) Jesus freely suffered and died vicariously for a bride that He individually knows and loves, so that He would be head over this specific body that was recorded, name by name, in a book called "the book of life" and who were given to Him by His Father before time began. Before creation ever took place. (Eph 1:4-5; 1 Pet 1:2; Rev 13:8, 17:8)

### **Verse 18b**

***and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.***

This is that church body that He rose again from the grave to head up and lead, in His Father's eternal kingdom; which kingdom the Father has placed entirely under His leadership and authority. Jesus is head of the body in as much as He has died to free it from its bondage to sin, and rose again from the grave to establish it as holy and blameless and eternal before Himself and his Father. All of this so that He Himself might come to have first place in absolutely everything. (v.18b) And He holds that position not just because He created it, and sustains it moment by moment, but also because He redeemed it, and purchased, it with His own life's blood, so that none can ever protest His claim of either ownership or headship of all that exists, forever and ever.

We are so overwhelmingly grateful to Jesus for His willingness to give up His life for us by crucifixion, that we sometimes have difficulty seeing past this single act. But in fact, that's just part of what He did for us. Paul reminds us in Romans 5:10, where he says:

*10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

Our justification is by His death, but our salvation into His eternal kingdom is by the indwelling and sanctifying Spirit, dispensed and demonstrated by His resurrection from the dead and ascension into the heavens. His demonstration of absolute power over death and sin is our hope of eternal salvation. If He can do it Himself, then He can do that for us as well. And thus has He promised do for those who believe Him, and love Him, and submit to His authority.

As the firstborn from the dead after his crucifixion, He is the leader of a host of previously dead humanity, both spiritually and humanly, that have been redeemed, regenerated, and transformed, and therefore follow Him freely and gratefully; and unhesitatingly ascribe Him first place over not only themselves, but over all things that exist. In fact, it is toward this final state of mind and comprehension in His elect, that all of the creation of this age and time is working. And when completed, He will sum everything up, and subject everything to Himself. As it is written:

*20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*  
Phil 3:20-21 (NASB)

And Christ's Resurrection Guarantees Ours, as it's written:

*20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. 22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at His coming, the people of Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when He abolishes all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy to be abolished is death. 27 For He has put everything under His feet. But when it says "everything" is put under Him, it is obvious that He who puts everything under Him is the exception. 28 And when everything is subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who subjected everything to Him, so that God may be all in all.*  
1 Cor 15:20-28 (HCSB)

Do we see and understand just exactly what's being described here in these verses? The Father has put all His fullness of character and holiness into His Son and put Him in charge of all His possessions, and Jesus the Son has faithfully brought that creation into full compliance with His Father's desires, and reconciled all offenses. He has transformed the elect that His Father has given Him into His own image (Phi 3:21), and has abolished all rebellion by those rulers and authorities that He created in the first place (v.16), and has by so doing, established His place of absolute authority. But that's not the end of the story. After doing all of this, and faithfully earning what His Father has allocated to Him, He then both lovingly and respectfully turns and submits it all back to His Father, as an acknowledgment that God the Father truly, is all and in all. This is what's happening on the grand and cosmic scale of eternal creation.

### **Conclusion:**

If we don't understand that we're traveling through this life with the purpose of reaching a certain destination, then we can start to think that life is all about the journey itself. By that I mean, that so much of our concerns are about what happens today, and how well we're getting along, and how prosperous we are, or how healthy we are, that we completely lose focus on the final goal. And then we can't understand why there are tragedies and setbacks along the way. We can even become embittered when we encounter them, and question God's loving affection. Now all of these things are significant for sure, but we mustn't let these things be the focus of our lives.

It is man's nature to be self-centered. We tend to evaluate everything in terms of how it affects us directly. If there's a storm coming, we want to know if it's coming our way or will it miss us. If we're in the path then we're worried, but if not then we really aren't too concerned. If there's an economic crisis on the horizon, how badly will we ourselves be affected? Will we lose our job? If so we're desperately worried, but if we feel our job is secure, then we're not so much concerned.

The fact is, man has an amazing ability for adapting to tragedies, especially now in the time of mass communications. Not a day seems to go by that we don't see or hear about some major world tragedy, and we've learned to just brush it off as part of life. As long as it's somebody else's life. The point of this is that humanity, and most of Christendom as well, has learned to make evaluations, and base our actions, on those things that we perceive to immediately affect our own day to day lives. Life is all about today and shouldn't ever include anything that's unpleasant. If it does then our "god" that we've manufactured in our minds, isn't living up to His obligations to us.

It's sad but true that there has always been false teachers who promote Jesus Christ as a means to a happy and prosperous life, but that's not what Jesus offered at all. What He offered was forgiveness of sins at the expense of our total submission to His will. All through history following the commandments of God has had its complications as well as its benefits. The New Testament is a testimony to both the blessings and the tragedies of being one who is a part of God's eternal kingdom plan. Ask Jesus if this is so. Or, ask His twelve Apostles what was the cost of following Jesus.

There is an eternal plan in action, predestined by God from before creation, and everything that He's created is specifically designed for the express purpose of carrying out that predetermined plan. And we're told to be grateful every moment, regardless of our circumstances, if we are a part of that plan, and are predestined to be with Him in that final kingdom. (Rom 8:18) This is that destination that I referred to earlier, and bumps in the road are declared by God Himself as part of the preparation process.

We're often told to focus our attention on the invisible things that are eternal rather than the visible things that are temporary (2Cor 4:18), and we're told to store up our treasures in heaven where they're safe and secure, not here on this earth where they're in constant jeopardy. (Mat 6:19-21) All much easier said than done I'll freely admit. So, this is why we need constant reminding of our place and purpose, and His place and purpose, in the eternal plan of God. We must always remember that Jesus Christ is the head of all things by the decree of God the Father, and to honor the Father one must honor the Son, because the Father loves the Son and has set Him as ruler and king over all that is His, forever and ever. Amen

Robert Andrews  
Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami  
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