

COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 1:15-20(d)

Lesson #6

Introduction & Review

Last week we finished at verse 18, but just like the week before, I feel like there's a little more that needs to be said on this verse than we covered in our study. So, I'm going to try to cover that shortfall in this introduction and review, before we go on to the next verse.

We've already said that this group of verses, 15-18 are entirely about the preeminent position of Jesus Christ in the whole of the creation plan of God the Father. They tell us that He, Jesus, had an active part in that process, and that He has an active part in holding it together moment by moment. He established the physical boundaries of matter and energy, and the invisible boundaries of power, and authority, and rulership, and dominions. There is nothing whatsoever in the heavens or on the earth that He didn't create Himself for His own predetermined purposes, and all things will do their specific part in the working out of His eternal plan. He is not frustrated, thwarted, hampered, impeded, or forced to make alterations of any kind whatsoever to achieve His intended purpose.

But now, to get on to the point I want to make about verse 18. As we read through these verses more and more aspects of the preeminent place of Jesus are opened up for us to see. However, when we get to verse 18, for some reason we read this verse with the verbal emphasis on the words "body" and "church." (Read it that way for an example) We use enunciation in such a way as to make these two words the highlight of the sentence. In doing this we shift the whole emphasis away from Christ and onto us, as the church. I don't think we do this intentionally, but the effect is still the same.

When Christ and man are mentioned in the same sentence we almost always see that sentence from the perspective of man, not the perspective of Jesus. In the opening portion of verse 18, the two words that must get the emphasis are "He" and "head," as this whole sentence is all about Him. (Read it again with proper emphasis) This sentence isn't talking so much about the church itself, as it is the place and position of Jesus Christ over that body called the church. It goes on to say that He is the beginning, the firstborn, and He comes to have the first place in everything.

Now, having made that clear, let me say that the mention of Christ's place as head over this body of redeemed sinners, which He redeemed himself alone, is nevertheless significant in so much as it indicates the importance of this body of redeemed in the overall plan of God. It's this body of redeemed who were chosen before creation to become companions for Jesus, and eternal worshipers for God the Father. And it's for the purpose of shaping, and educating, and molding, this predestined group into that body, that all time and creation were designed to accomplish. And it will be accomplished, because the One who is doing it is Jesus Christ, (through the agency of the Holy Spirit) by the power that His Father has given Him to subject all things to Himself. (Phi 3:21)

In a discussion of the preeminent place of Jesus Christ in the whole comprehensive plan of God, it's necessary to first understand that there is a preplanned, pre-decided, and wholly predetermined purpose, and everything that's taking place is working, by design, toward that precisely planned outcome. All those that the Father has given to His Son Jesus will come to Him in their respective times, as predestined before creation. (Rom 8:28-29; Jn 6:37)

Regardless of it's wickedness and mockery, He will not bring this age to a close until each and every one of His predetermined elect have come to repentance and faith. (2Pet 3:9) Not a single one whom the Father has given to His Son will be lost (Jn 6:37-40) and no more can come than those who are specifically chosen and irresistibly drawn by the Father, (Jn 6:44, 64-65) and recorded by name, in the Book of Life, that was written before creation ever took place. The entire plan, and every single player in that plan, were predetermined by name before the first act of creation was ever commenced. (Eph 1:4-5; 1Pe 1:2; Rev 13:8, 17:8)

If we fail to understand this, then we cannot really understand the full scope of His preeminence, because preeminence must include total knowledge and full control, or it isn't really preeminence at all.

A discussion of the preeminence of Jesus Christ can only be commenced when one rightly understands the scope of His authority and the sovereignty of His decisions as to what He does with everything that's His. He is preeminent because His Father has made Him preeminent. And His Father both has, and freely uses, His sovereignty in the selection of a companion for His beloved Son, as well as the whole process by which that companion is made suitable to ultimately serve in that capacity. This is that body, the church, that's being mentioned in verse 18 as being under His headship, and over which He exercises full authority and leadership, and for which the Father has specifically designed the whole creation plan. It is this body who will be made capable of perceiving His glory, and comprehending His awesome powers, and appreciating His mercy, and recognizing the value of His infinite and perfect righteousness. This is that body that will worship Him in spirit and in truth, which is what the Father has determined from the very beginning to produce for Himself and for His beloved Son. (Jn 4:23) Having said that, I think we can bring this introduction and review to a close and move on to our next set of verses in this series titled:

Part 4

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)

Verse 19:

19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

Surely there is much that can be said in regards to this verse. It's implications are broad, and I want to touch on all of them. But our obligation to the scriptures is to first determine what's being said within the immediate context that we're reading. And without debate, the context is the preeminence of Jesus Christ. So, the first thing we're being told is that it was by God the Father's good pleasure, that He placed all His own fullness, of character, holiness, and every discernable attribute in His Son, to be seen by men and angels as His own visible representation.

It's as though God is saying, "if you wish to see Me, then see My Son, He's everything that I am, packaged in a visible human body." After such an endorsement, what more can be said? If this endorsement just came from man alone it would be extraordinary, but coming through the inspired holy scriptures, this endorsement is the highest commendation that can be given in the universe, to anyone or anything. The Father's highest possible praise of His beloved Son is that His Son is the exact representation of Himself. Remember the words of Jesus to Philip on the night before His crucifixion? What did he tell him and the other disciples?

7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." 8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."9 Jesus said* to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.11 "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.*

John 14:7-11 (NASB)

It would have been very easy for the scriptures to have just said that all the fullness dwells in Him. But that's just part of the sentence, and it just conveys a part of the thought. First the verse says that *it was the Father's good pleasure* for all the fullness to dwell in Jesus. We can understand this even on a human level. When our sons or daughters display virtuous works we're proud to call them our children, and we take great pleasure in their actions.

Here we're being told that God the Father takes pleasure in the display of His own attributes, in all their fulness, through the words and actions of His beloved Son. The Father is pleased with His Son and is glorified by the actions and words that He's taken. The Father needs not make any excuses for His Son, but fully endorses Him as being His own exact representation, in every perceivable way and form. Jesus is sinless and perfect and obedient to absolute perfection, earning Him His Father's highest possible praise. And, qualifying Him to be that sole source of substitute perfect righteousness that's required for every human, and probably every angel, to enter that eternal kingdom of perfection, where no sin will ever enter. (Rev 21:27) In 2nd Corinthians Paul says:

21 He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Cor 5:21 (NASB)

If only those who are perfectly and totally righteous can and will ever enter into the eternal kingdom of God that we call heaven, then who can be saved you might ask? Answer, only those who offer the perfect righteousness of Christ to God instead of their own righteousness. And this is what 2 Cor 5:21 is telling us. This is the beloved Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, who has been allowed to offer His own perfect righteousness as a direct substitute for the flawed and stained righteousness of every one of those whom the Father has given to Him from eternity past. This is a perfect Jesus, the total fullness of everything that constitutes the whole nature and character of God the Father.

(Discuss the claims by some that Jesus sinned, and the misconception that He was made a sinner when He was on the cross)

I can't think of a better, and more fitting place, than in a study of the preeminence of Jesus Christ, to discuss a common misconception about Him that reflects negatively both on His glory and His character. And the verse that we just quoted from 2 Cor 5:21 is one of the verses where that happens. We very often hear it taught that when He was on that cross, Jesus was seen by His Father as a vile sinner so offensive that He had to look away. I respectfully submit that this inference, drawn from this verse and some others, is not by any means what's rightly being implied in this verse. I submit that this mistaken inference is diametrically opposed to what the text, and all of scriptures say about Jesus, and His place in the eyes of His Father. Rather than Jesus being vile and disgusting in His Father's sight at that moment, I confidently assert that in that hour, and that moment, Jesus was never seen more lovingly, and exquisitely, and sinlessly, and gloriously than when He was voluntarily forfeiting His own perfect life as a substitutionary sacrifice for those true sinners who really deserved it. And all at the plan and request of His own loving Father. If there was ever a time that God was most proud of His Son, it would be that very hour. Jesus told His disciples that it was for that very hour that He came into the world in the first place. (Jn 12:27) God didn't send His Son into the world to become vile sin, but to be publically demonstrated as glorious, even while being rejected and reviled by man.

When it is says that He was made to be sin on our behalf, it by no means implies that He became a sinner Himself so that He could receive the penalty. The proper understanding here is that He became sin in the objective general sense, in that He was bearing the resultant penalty for sin in His own body. He was made to be the object of sin upon which mandatory wrath was being applied. It's very wrong to ascribe a subjective sense to this verse. Christ never, in any way, shape, or form, took on subjective sin in His person. He took the mandatory penalty required by His Father for sins that were subjectively committed by others only. He did not become a sinner, He became the personal object of its required wrath. This does not for one second imply that His Father saw Him at that moment as sin or as a sinner, but rather as His own perfect suitable propitiation for the vileness of sin that had alienated His chosen children.

If there was any kind of disconnection, as may be inferred from Jesus's cry to His Father of why He had been forsaken, then it's just as reasonable to conclude that it was because His Father couldn't bear to look upon this travesty that was coming upon His own Son. It could just as well be argued that the Father may well have had to turn His back to this holocaust or He would have stopped it, and let mankind perish for themselves. What would you have done if this were your Son and it was within your power to stop it? Would you have to turn your back to be able bear it?

Again, sin was never placed *within* Jesus, but the full penalty for it was placed *upon* Jesus. He bore the punishment, with all its ugliness, but not the crimes. He is and ever was, for every microsecond of His eternal existence, sinless, and perfect, and holy, and the most beautiful sight in His Father's eyes, without exception or interruption, ever. And thus He is, and has always been, the unstained, unblemished, preeminent person, place or thing that exists in the eyes of almighty God the Father.

I hope I never again have to hear it taught that Jesus was the most sinful thing in the universe in the sight of God as he hung upon that cross. Rather this was His finest and clearly most sinless and holy hour in the sight of every creature that has the capacity to think and reason and understand. In fact, if it were otherwise, our debt would still be due.

To sum this up. Jesus no more became a sinner Himself during His crucifixion than we became the righteousness of God ourselves because of it. It is precisely His total separation from any sin, at any time, that qualifies His propitiatory offering, and it is His substitutionary perfect righteousness that meets the absolute requirement for entry into God's kingdom for those who have no such thing to offer of their own. Jesus neither gained or lost anything as to His own essential nature in the equation. By that I mean, that the basic nature of Jesus didn't change by the crucifixion. He was as sinless after as He was before. He was God the Son after, and He was God the Son before. The difference is, that this act provided the means for His death to directly substitute for ours, and His righteousness to directly substitute for our lack thereof. In our own essence, neither He nor we are really any different than before. It's entirely about the substitution of Him, for the deficiencies of us. But, now don't misunderstand me and conclude that I'm antinomian.

Of course we're indwelt by His Spirit, and our behaviors are radically changed, but we are no more perfect in and of ourselves, than He was sinful, when He died. We aren't made perfect ourselves in this lifetime, or we wouldn't still need Him as our substitute. We must forever understand, that in the Father's eyes, it's not our own righteousness that He's seeing, but that of His own Son Jesus. However, the gift of perfect righteousness is a most precious and glorious part of what has been promised to His children upon His return, when we shall finally be perfected and conformed to the image of Jesus. (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 4:11-13; Phi 1:6; 3:20-21; 1Jn 3:1-3)

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. Romans 8:29-30 (NASB)

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. Eph 4:11-13 (NASB)

6 I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Phil 1:6 (HCSB)

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)

1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1 John 3:1-3 (NASB)

So we see that everything hinges on Jesus. He's our substitutionary payee for our debt of sin, and, He's our only possible substitutionary source for the mandatory perfect righteousness that's required to enter the eternal kingdom of God. Do we see now why He's said to be preeminent? Apart from Him, nothing good happens, either for mankind, or for the Father Himself, who has eternal plans for mankind. Christ makes everything happen in the implementation and fulfillment of the plan of God. How rightly indeed did He say that He was the way, the truth, and the life, and no one gets to God the Father unless they come through the provisions that He has made. (Jn 14:6)
As the scriptures also say:

14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matt 7:14 (NASB)

Conclusion:

I cannot possibly overstate the degree of the preeminence of this Jesus in the whole plan of creation and eternity. He is everything to God, and everything to us, and the only thing that links us to God in a saving way. (Jn 14:6) Unless one is found to be “in Him” that is, included in that body that He has redeemed by name, and indwelt by His Spirit, then their only relationship to God will be the terrifying knowledge of His wrath. (Heb 10:31) (Missing from today's gospel)

The Father was pleased to place all His fullness of holiness, righteousness, character, and glory, in the incarnate person of His only beloved Son. And it is through Him that the Father speaks to us in these last days of His glorious plan and promises. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews begins it with these words:

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He [the Son] is the radiance of His [the Father's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.
Heb 1:1-4 (NASB)

We see here stated in the epistle to the Hebrews, all those same things we've just read in verses 15-17 of Colossians. By the mouths of many prophets the Lord confirms His testimony. And all affirm that His Son, Jesus is the exact representation of the Father; that it is through Him that the creation both took place, and stays in place moment by moment. The place that Jesus holds, and the works that He performs, are the very hinge points on which every work of creation turns; from the day that the worlds were spoken into existence, to the day when the new heavens and new earth are revealed and the holy city descends from heaven to take its eternal place on that new earth. All revolves around Jesus.

And when that day comes, it will be this same Jesus that will be tangibly visible to us, His redeemed, and through whom the radiance of God will shine forth and illuminate the universe, from within the body of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our King and our God.

Just as Jesus is now the visible representation of the Father, likewise then will He remain that person of the almighty triune Godhead which we may see with our eyes and touch with our hands. He ever was, He is now, and He always will be, that unique and solitary linking element whereby mankind may commune with his God. He in us, and we in Him, through Jesus Christ, forever and ever. Amen.

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