

## The Supremacy of Christ

### Colossians 1:15-23

#### Introduction:

**Supreme:** “Supremacy” is the “state or condition of being superior to all others in authority, power, or status.” What do you think of when you think of “supremacy”?

- White supremacy (the explicit or implicit belief in the superiority of white people).
- Supreme clothing brand (I’m too old to get it).
- Taco Bell Supreme (a stylistic upgrade to many Taco Bell products, leveling up). Somehow better?
- Motivation: Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, self-actualization).

**Supremacy of Christ:** In Colossians 1:15-23, we see Paul quote a pre-Pauline hymn (talk about the early belief in Jesus as Christ! No way the church invented Christ later on). The point of the hymn is the supremacy of Christ in all things.

- Jesus isn’t just the boss of the game (**Bowzer**) but the creator of the game. **Christ isn’t just a level up, he is the creator, sustainer, and ruler of all things and, therefore, he is the rightful owner of every part of your life.**
- One of the reasons Paul writes this letter to the church in Colossae is because the believers there seem to have been influenced by the culture around them in a way that has warped their understanding of God. The culture undermined **supremacy of Christ** by trying to lower him to the status of other created beings and undermine the **sufficiency of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross** by telling them there was some extra effort or activity they needed to be saved.
- They had a “Jesus and (+)” mentality: we worship Jesus *and* embrace these other things to supply whatever Jesus might leave lacking.
- Because Jesus is supreme over all things, nothing compares to him, nothing is needed to save us except his work. And **because Christ is supreme over all things, he should be first place in my life.**

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. <sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the

gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Supremacy of Christ in Creation (vv. 15-17)

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

**Image of the Invisible God:** <sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, He (Jesus) the beloved Son (1:13) is God in the flesh. “The very nature and character of God have been perfectly and fully revealed in him. In him the invisible has become visible” (cf. Jn 1).

- “We can only know God through God.” We can only truly learn about God from God. In fact, we can only truly know ourselves through God. We don’t deduce or figure him out.
- “We long to know who God is and what God thinks and does. In Jesus, his most personal Word, God has ‘spoken’ to us in the most human way possible, giving us his innermost thoughts and heart, in deeds that are as profound as his words” (Bruner).
- “Do you want to know what God is like? Do you want to know what God does, how he feels, what he delights in, what he is harsh toward? Look to Jesus” (Chandler).
- God is a mystery, but not an unknowable mystery, a mystery that has been revealed (unveiled) in the incarnation, in Jesus.
  - The only way to see God is to see Jesus. And looking to Jesus does something to us, it transforms us to be like him.
  - You can’t grow in godliness unless you have a sense of what godliness looks like, and Jesus gives us that picture (need a target to aim at).

**Firstborn:** the firstborn of all creation. This refers to his “status” and “position,” his prerogative (rights as the firstborn) But it is prototype, a pattern. This is not like my son is the firstborn. Jesus was begotten (born) not made.

- He wasn’t created (because he created all things, cf. 1:16).

**Creator:** <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. Jesus is supreme because he is the agent of all of creation (e.g., he doesn’t pray to

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>15</sup> ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, <sup>16</sup> ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται· <sup>17</sup> καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν, <sup>18</sup> καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὃς ἐστὶν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πάσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων, <sup>19</sup> ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι <sup>20</sup> καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξει τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, [δι’ αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. <sup>21</sup> Καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς, <sup>22</sup> νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ, <sup>23</sup> εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει θεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἑδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἠκούσατε, τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν, οὗ ἑγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος.

God for creation to obey, he commands it to obey because he is its creator; “even the wind and waves obey him”).

- He is not simply part of the created order but all that he made, he made by means of him(self). The fact that Jesus created everything clarifies that Jesus was never created, he is God so he has always existed.
- God is the only uncreated thing. Everything else has a beginning. Not Jesus.
- This should be simultaneously comforting and fear-inducing.
  - (1) There is no threat (internal or external) that is beyond his power. So calm down, he’s got this. Trust him
    - Jesus doesn’t just help you from little inconveniences (e.g., tests, relationships, etc.). He has power over the big things too. **What is the thing you are afraid Jesus can’t protect you from?**
  - (2) You belong completely to him. He has complete authority in your life. He can tell you where to go and what to do (i.e., “Lordship”).
    - Savior vs. Lord.
- You were made *through* him and *for* him. **You were made by Jesus and for Jesus.** Everything else you worship disappoints and everything else you serve lets you down.
  - Little boy, wiffleball. Swing, miss (2x). “You’re doing it wrong, you’re supposed to throw the ball where I’m swinging the bat.” We want God to adjust to us rather than adjusting to him.

**Sustainer:** <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Nothing happens outside of the permission of God. He doesn’t *cause* everything *per se* but he does have sovereign control (he can intervene in anything he wants).

- Chaos to order (creation).
- Order to chaos (sin, cf. devolution of Noah, Babel, etc.).
- Salvation, redemption, reconciliation will bring all of creation to order. God offers that redemption to us now (down payment). He can bring peace to our souls in the midst of a chaotic world.
  - **If he sustains the universe, he can sustain us.**
- Your faith is not meant to be a private, personal, keep to yourself thing because Jesus isn’t a private, personal Savior. He is not less than your Savior, he is more. He is Lord of all.
- “Jesus’ lordship is as wide as creation.” Because he created it all. “And if his lordship is as wide as creation, then the Christian mission is as wide as creation” (Ashford, Thomas).
  - “Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and because of that fact, every aspect of our lives should be affected by the fact that we are Christians” (Ashford, Kuyper).
  - Who you date. How you vote. When you wake up. Why you work. Where you live. What you value.

## 2. The Supremacy of Christ in the Church (v. 18)

<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

**Head:** <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. The metaphor of the “head” is helpful in a lot of ways. The “head” is the most visible and personal part of you. It is the decision-making center of who you are. We are identified and led by our “heads.”

- What would the church of God be if the body (an important metaphor in Scripture to describe the many parts we play) led the way? Your spleen is not calling the shots of your life (I hope your brain is, but more frequently your heart *or other things*).
- Who’s in charge? Jesus (he should be). His agenda should drive ours. His priorities should be our priorities. We need to elevate him (i.e., Lead Pastor; don’t say you go to “pastor’s” church, you go to Jesus’ church!).
- The church should be the visible place (here on earth) where the rule of Christ is most evident. It should be an earthly community that is shaped and formed by the character and commands of Jesus.
  - Jesus is the head of the church, the ruler and leader, but before we get there, it’s important to ask you, “is he the head of your life?”

**Firstborn:** He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

- His supremacy is significant for our salvation. He had to pass through death to offer us life. He had to be raised from the dead to offer us resurrection.
- **Hypostatic Union: Fully God/Fully man.** If he was less than 100% man he wouldn’t be an acceptable substitute (cf. “not assumed, not saved”). If he was less than 100% God he wouldn’t be powerful enough to conquer death and save us.
- Preeminent means: foremost, greatest, surpassing all others.
  - Jesus is not someone you put on a list of priorities. He’s the page
  - on which all other priorities are written. He’s in a class by himself.
    - My wife: “You’re top of my list of women...” She’s in a class all by herself. **Incomparable.**
    - Even more so with Jesus! He is why you exist. You were created by him and for him. That means he can never be merely an important commitment in your life. He must be first.
    - Not just *important* but *first*.
- It ain’t about you (or me). Jesus has done a lot of things for us— more than anyone else has—but it still ain’t about us.

### 3. The Supremacy of Christ in Salvation (vv. 19-20)

<sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

**Fully God:** <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι)

- Different from an angel or other divine representation, Jesus is *fully* God. He's not a partial embodiment of God, but the whole thing.
- God is fullness (object of "fullness" is implied as "God").
  - God is the only uncreated thing. God is the only being that exists in and of himself (everything else is derivative).
  - You and I were made by God and for God. We exist because of his love for us, not of ourselves. Everything is wrapped up in him.
- If Christ is the fullness of God, then you won't find fullness anywhere else. And I can't actually become who I fully am meant to be until I am fully his.
  - Where are you seeking fulfillment? (relationship, achievement, substance, etc.).

**Reconciliation:** <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

- All of us and all things are estranged from God because of sin. You don't have to look far to see that things are broken. The beauty of the gospel is that God has made a way to bring those things together.
- Don't trust human intelligence to find God (even yours). When the love of God showed up on this earth, we killed him.
  - He has reconciled us to himself by himself. **The great distance between us and God was crossed by God himself.** Through him (**there is no other way**).
  - We live in a culture that demands atonement and punishment but rarely offers a path to forgiveness and redemption. The gospel of Jesus gives us that path.
- This is important, God paid the price for our reconciliation with his own body. His payment was painful and bloody. Real love is not some disconnected, ethereal, spiritualized reality, it is a bloody, earthly reality.
  - Sometimes we live in a nostalgic, spiritualized, philosophical world of religion. But the gospel meets us in the broken, bloody, and real parts of our lives.
  - At the cross, God meets us in the undeniable brokenness of our world.
  - And the future promise of the gospel is that all the is broken, alienated, separated from God will be made right.

#### 4. The Supremacy of Christ in My Life (vv. 21-23)

<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

**Point:** So, **Jesus is first and he went first so we should put him first in our lives.**

- Ron Swanson (liars & skim milk, water lying about being milk): Just give me all the bacon and eggs you have. ... I'm worried what you just heard was, "Give me a lot of bacon and eggs." What I said was, "Give me all the bacon and eggs you have." Do you understand?

- First place in everything (heart, affection, time, priority, gifts, goals, treasure).
  - We often give him leftovers (money, time, stage of life, etc.).

**Make It Personal:** <sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

- And you = personal. Remember what you were? What he did?
  - You won't value your salvation if you don't see the sin from which you were saved as what it was: ugly, evil.
- Why did he do it? in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,
- The world is broken. Society is broken. Relationships are broken. I am broken (you are broken). I am sinful (you are sinful). In my sin, I am alienated from and hostile toward God. But the cross not only offers reconciliation for creation, it offers reconciliation for me. His broken body is the bridge we cross to salvation.
  - To experience the transformation of the gospel, I have to first come into honest acceptance of my own sinful self (**True vs. False self**). If I can't be honest with God, others, and myself about my shortcomings and sin, then I can never experience the reconciliation God offers.
  - God wants *all* of you, not some of you.
    - I see it. There are parts of us that we don't want to surrender, so we hide them (from God and from other believers). We hold on to our sin and think we can appease God with some other parts of our life. God wants *all* of you, not some of you.

**Finish Strong:** <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

- This is a firm foundation. This is a place in which you can have true belonging, eternal security, and a stable identity that won't betray you in the ups and downs of life.
  - I've never ridden a Segway (the inventor died on one). Seem *unstable*. I can't do a stand up paddleboard, or one of those surfboard things, wakeboarding, etc. **I need firm ground beneath my feet.**
  - Jesus Christ is the only secure foundation on which to build my life. Jesus is our rock, our cornerstone, our unmoving anchor in every storm of life. He must be our foundation because everything else is like shifting sand. Only faith in Jesus will stand the test of time.
- Paul is not worried about how they started, but how they will finish. Proof of gospel transformation is only confirmed when you cross the finish line.
- Is Jesus is our great starting point, then we dare not deviate. Continue in him.
  - Not always obvious. We often want to **add** something to Jesus (need Jesus plus *hustle, education, prosperity, comfort, impact*, etc.). Or we want to **subtract** and diminish Jesus.
    - We'll give him some of our time but not let him determine our schedule.

- We'll give him some of our money but not let him determine what our heart treasures.
    - We'll give him some of our relationships, but hold onto a few we know he doesn't approve of.
    - We'll give him some of our trust, but keep a backup plan on speed dial.
  - Maybe we'll say a prayer, or pop in occasionally to church or Bible study. We'll claim to be team Jesus as long as it doesn't mean he actually has to be **first place in all things**.
- "We cannot skip the way of Jesus in our hurry to get the truth of Jesus as he is worshiped and proclaimed." Jesus' Lordship begins to show up in our lives, when our lives begin to follow him in every area.
- The Bible uses three related words when it talks about discipleship. Jesus says **repent** (leave one way of life and set out on another). He says **believe** (which involves personal trust). And he says **follow** (moving obediently in a way of life that Jesus demonstrates). How many of us have "believed" in Jesus but we have held onto another way of life, or shielded part of ourselves from him. We have failed to follow him where he calls us to go.
- Too many of us have set the goal of God and heaven, but done nothing to walk toward that end (e.g., kid wants to be a doctor but doesn't do well in school; probably not gonna make it through med school if you can't be bothered to study for high school chemistry, Johnny!).

**Treasuring Jesus:** "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matt 13:44). How many of us claim Jesus is our treasure, but we won't sell what we have to buy the field?

**Conclusion:**

**Surrender:** God has true and rightful ownership of all of creation, including you. You can trust him with every part of yourself (the messy, ugly parts; worries, fears, temptations, sins).

- Surrender it all to him. Turn all of yourself and give it to him.

Is Jesus first place in your life? Is he supreme?

- What do you need to let go of and stop doing?
- What do you need to take hold of and start doing?
  - By his strength and in his power, ask him for help and start walking that direction.