

# THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Kevin Jones

*IN THIS SERIES OF THREE BIBLE STUDIES, MET EXEC MEMBER, THE REV'D KEVIN JONES, VISITS THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST AS REVEALED IN THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS (THE SUBJECT OF THE 2019 BIBLE MONTH).*

Colossians is as much a book for our day as it was for the early church. Epaphras, the minister at Colossae, is facing enthusiastic false teachers; he realises their error but is unsure how to respond. The church is growing and grappling with its understanding of Christ. In the face of embryonic error, he seeks the Apostle's wisdom. Then, through the challenge of facing up to error, a clearer understanding of the supremacy of Christ is revealed. False teaching, in this instance, leads to a deeper understanding and expression of the truth of the person and work of Christ. Today, it can also cause us to think more deeply about what we really believe and help us express the truth more clearly.

The false teachers proclaimed that a hidden knowledge was available to the new gentile converts. They did not deny faith in Christ but argued that faith was the beginning. It qualified gentile believers to experience Jewish ceremonies and angelic authorities. Their Gospel was Christ plus angels, Christ plus circumcision, Christ plus observing Jewish laws and rituals. Paul is clear that it is not Christ plus - it is Christ alone. He outlines Christ's supremacy in four areas.

## HIS SUPREME PERSON – 'THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD'

Our image of someone reveals our understanding of who they are; often our image of Christ is as a baby at Bethlehem, a miracle worker, or a crucified saviour. Paul introduces him as supreme over the universe. Images have two functions, to represent and to disclose; an image depicts and reveals its subject - seeing the image, you understand more of the thing or person represented.

In Exodus, images of God are expressly forbidden: 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath; you shall not bow down

to them... For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God' (Exodus 20:4-5). The problem with an image of God is that it debases his glory; representing his strength omits his meekness and representing his compassion omits his judgement. An image of God is at best partial and at worst deceptive. God is Spirit and a representation made by human beings cannot capture his majesty; we need the Holy Spirit to reveal to our spirit the specific image of God that we need at any given time.

Our problem is that as 'Spirit,' God is invisible. If we want to know what God is like we have no frame of reference. That is, until Jesus; as Paul tells us, Christ is the 'image of the invisible God' - God is depicted exactly in Jesus. 'God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him' (Colossians 1:19). Jesus not only depicts God to us, he reveals God to us. He is the invisible God, made visible. Only in Jesus is the full majesty of God adequately made known.

## HIS SUPREME STATUS – THE 'FIRSTBORN'

This term causes problems for some; they assume that firstborn means born or created first, thus denying both Christ's divinity and eternity. The title 'firstborn' is not always about chronology, it is also about pre-eminence. Biblically, the firstborn in a family has the right of inheritance - they inherit the family farm, name and blessing, they hold the chief status in the family. Jacob follows Abraham and Isaac in the list of descendants, but he was not the firstborn; because Esau despised his birthright, Jacob became pre-eminent. Similarly, Solomon was not a firstborn son, but held the status of firstborn on becoming King (Psalm 89:27).

The term firstborn is used of Jesus many times. In the Christmas story he is literally Mary's firstborn: 'she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger (Luke 2:7). Here the use is chronological - she had other naturally born children after Jesus (see Matthew 12:26 and Mark 3:31-32).

'The firstborn among many brothers' (Romans 8:29) and the church belonging to 'the firstborn' (Hebrews 12:23), are titles of Christ's pre-eminence. He is the head of the family and ruler of his Church; he is the elder brother with the rights of inheritance. However, he is not the only one to bear the image of God; through regeneration we bear the likeness of God in our soul, we become his 'many brothers.' The titles 'firstborn over creation,' 'firstborn over the Church' and 'firstborn from the dead,' speak of Christ's supremacy. It is a title displaying his dignity and honour not his chronology. Christ is 'first' in status and first in authority, he is the one who has the right to rule creation, not just because he existed before creation, but because he performed the act of creation itself; 'by him all things were created' (Colossians 1:16).

## 24 Bible Study: The Supremacy Of Christ

The New Testament revelation depicts Christ's deity and supremacy over all created things. God, 'the Father,' created the universe, through the work of Christ 'the Son.' The relationship between designer and builder helps us; did the designer or builder make the building? The answer is, they both did. The picture we are given is of God as the designer, and Jesus as the master builder. He enacted the creation to the Father's specific design. It was made 'by him' and exists 'for him'. At the end of time, a redeemed creation will be Christ's inheritance, bestowed by the Father.

Then Paul dismisses the idea of angelic intermediaries, for Christ also created 'dominions, principalities or powers' (Colossians 1:16). Today, he sustains his creation through his active intervention, for, 'in him all things hold together' (Colossians 1:17).

## HIS SUPREME MISSION – 'RECONCILIATION'

'God was pleased... to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood' (Colossians 1:19-20). We need reconciling because we 'were alienated from God and were enemies in our minds because of our evil behaviour' (Colossians 1:21). Most people do not see themselves as God's enemies, but as basically good people who make mistakes. The Scripture is clear; we are tainted by sin and a holy God cannot overlook the sin of the human heart. So, God in Christ has

acted to reconcile us, and reconciliation is hard work; reconciliation brings together warring parties.

This is Christ's work: he came to reconcile enemies, to make peace through his blood, to cleanse and forgive, to 'present us holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation' (Colossians 1:22). God's moral laws innumerate and accuse us of sin, the law condemns, but Christ the 'lamb of God' reconciles, his blood became the price of our peace. Reconciliation has three parts: we were reconciled at the cross, we are reconciled through faith and we will be reconciled, 'blameless, and above reproach,' at his coming.

## HIS SUPREME PURPOSE – 'TO MAKE US HOLY'

Christ's supreme purpose is to 'present you holy without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel' (Colossians 1:22-23). Some believers at Colossae were falling away; Paul explains that the purpose of faith is to produce a changed life. We cannot save ourselves, but we can make sure that we continue in the faith. The sign of true faith is a renewed mind (Romans 12:2). God expects devotion to lead to holiness: 'Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth' (Colossians 3:1-3).

The false teachers preached salvation through secret knowledge. Paul explains that the secret or 'mystery...

hidden for generations... is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Colossians 1:26-27). If Christ lives in us, then God himself is in us; when the believer has Christ within, they will honour him as supreme above all, and walk in holiness as revealed in his word; for, 'without holiness no-one will see the Lord' (Hebrews 12:14). Diminishing Christ, or indulging in sin, places us outside the faith. Only by knowing Christ, can we be rooted in worship and thankfulness: 'as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith... and overflowing with thankfulness' (Colossians 2:6-8).

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