

至高无上的爱子——歌罗西书 1:15-20

The Preeminent Beloved Son-- Colossians 1:15-20

Introduction, Outline

- Scripture reading: Colossian 1:15 - 20, John 1:1-18
- Worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24) requires not only complete devotion of body and soul, but also being “in truth,” that is, according to the truth. Therefore, **knowing the truth is vital to worship**. Otherwise, “you[’d be] worship[ing] what you do not know.” (John 4:22)
- Today’s scripture reveals a wealth of truth that is extremely important to our worship in spirit and truth. It shows us the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may be familiar with the basic truth here, but the language Paul uses is so lofty that it challenges our imagination and inspires our deeper reverence toward the Lord Jesus.
- Outline:
 - A. The Son’s Relationship to God (v15)
 - 1. The Son Is the Visible Image of the Invisible God
 - 2. The Son Is the Preeminent Firstborn of the Father
 - B. The Son’s Relationship to Creation (vv 16-17)
 - 1. The Son Is the Creator of All Things
 - 2. The Son Is the Sustainer of All Things
 - 3. The Son Is the Ultimate Purpose of All Things
 - C. The Son’s Relationship to the Church (v18)
 - 1. The Son Is the Head of the Church (Sustainer)
 - 2. The Son Is the Originator of the Church (Creator)
 - 3. The Son Is the Ultimate Purpose of the Church
 - D. Summarizing the Person and Work of the Son (vv 19-20)
 - 1. The Son Is Perfectly and Fully God
 - 2. The Son Has Perfectly and Fully Made Peace

Context

- Chapter 1 focuses on encouragement (verses 3-8 is thanksgiving for the church; verses 9-14 is prayer for the church). Chapter 2 focuses on instruction. This passage (1:15-20) lays a solid foundation for later instruction. So, obviously, it has a significant **teaching purpose**.
- However, according to the grammar of the original, this passage and the prayer in verse 9-14 are one sentence (The “He” at the beginning of verse 15 is actually a relative pronoun [“who”] which introduces a clause connected to the main sentence above). As part of a prayer, this passage is, first of all, Paul’s praise toward God.
- Application: the praise part of prayer is not a hollow emotional cry devoid of substance, like “Lord, I praise you” and nothing else. Worship in spirit and truth is telling God what you know about Him, and He is pleased to hear that from you.

A. The Son’s Relationship to God (v15)

1. *The Son Is the Visible Image of the Invisible God (v15a)*

- “Image of God” (Verse 15a): The concept of “image” entails not only resemblance, but also representation. Image not only resembles the real thing, but, more importantly, it represents the real thing. Such as: the image of Caesar in the denarius (Matthew 22:20).

Heresy: The image of Caesar is not Caesar himself, so, the image of God is not God himself. This verse implies that Jesus is not God.

Rebuttal: Image not only represents the real thing, but sometimes it *is* the real thing. In Hebrews 10:1, the Law “has only a shadow,” but Jesus is the “very form [image] of things.” Here, the image simply *is* the real thing. It had been hidden before the image revealed it, and there had only been a “shadow” from which we can guess the form of the real thing. Now, it was revealed by the “very form [image].” Therefore, the image is the real thing.

The correct understanding: This is exactly the meaning here, because God is “invisible God.” “God is spirit”(John 4:24), and our eyes cannot see it, so God, through his beloved son, the visible image, shows his form vividly before our eyes. Jesus is God showing Himself to man! “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” (**John 14:9**; See 1:1, 14, 18)

Theological Expansion: The title “image of God” is applied in the Bible not only to Jesus, but also, amazingly, on human beings (Genesis 1:26-28; 9:6, 1 Corinthians 11:7). Not in the same sense as Jesus has the divine essence we don’t, but that our spirit is similar to God (possessing intellect, emotion, and will) and we represent God’s authority on earth. After the Fall, the image of God was marred and lost its glory. Therefore, salvation includes restoring the image of God within man! **Colossians 3:10** “... [T]he new self [is] renewed to a true knowledge **according to the image of the One who created him;**” **2 Cor 3:18** “... [W]e all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are **being transformed into the same image...**” **Romans 8:29** “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become **conformed to the image of His Son...**” Jesus is the everything man was created to be by God’s design; and so conformity to His image is the ultimate goal of our salvation!

2. *The Son Is the Preeminent Firstborn of the Father (v15b)*

- “Firstborn”: the term can refer to first in time or first in rank.

Heresy: If there's a firstborn, there have to be those born later. The following text mentions the creation, therefore, firstborn means the one being created first.

Rebuttal: He is “the firstborn of [before/above] *all* creation,” not “*the rest of* all creations,” meaning He is not part of the creation. The following two verses clearly say He is the Creator, not a creature. He is “the *firstborn*,” everything else is “created.” Totally different!

The correct understanding: The title “firstborn” is not about time, but about position. It’s first in rank. Neither Jacob nor David were born the first, but both of them were designated as the firstborn (Genesis 25, Psalm 89:27). The firstborn son is one who inherits the father’s property, authority and status, so Hebrews 1:2 says Jesus was “appointed heir of all things.” Therefore, “the firstborn of all creation” refers to his place in rank, that He is above all creation with power and authority to rule it all.

B. The Son’s Relationship to Creation (vv 16-17)

1. The Son Is the Creator of All Things (v16)

- Created “by Him”, “through Him”, “for him”: The latter two phrases deal with the beginning and the end, the origin and the ultimate purpose of all creation. The first phrase in the original means “*in* Him,”

summing up the whole existence of all creation as in Christ. This somewhat abstract concept is perfectly explained by the latter 2 phrases and verse 17.

“Through Him” means everything is made by His “hand,” emphasizing Jesus’s personal involvement in the work of creation.

- “Thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities:” Not earthly kings or leaders, but these titles describe the “invisible” creation earlier in this verse. The same words appear in Ephesians 2:2, 3:10, 6:12 with such modifiers as “spiritual,” “of the air,” “in the heavenly,” clearly referring to spiritual beings including holy angels and fallen ones, the latter being all kinds of evil spirits.

Application: The spiritual world truly exists and the materialistic scientists are wrong! China is deeply affected by the lies of materialistic atheism. Many people don’t know how to deal with the evil spirits in the Bible after becoming a Christian. The spiritual world not only exists, but it also is created by Jesus for Himself! Do you believe that? This is God’s Word, not mine.

2. The Son Is the Sustainer of All Things (v17)

- “Hold together:” The verb literally means “to stand together” as all parts of an object “stand together” properly to form the whole that does not blow apart.

Illustration: the mystery of the nucleus. Here’s what a science website says, “The nucleus contains neutrons and protons. The neutrons are electrically neutral, and ... the protons are all positively charged, and so they all repel each other. So if the electric force was the only force involved, you couldn't create a nucleus. ... There has to be some other force that holds protons and neutrons together. Of course, since the electric force is constantly trying to drive the protons apart, the force that holds them all in must be stronger than the electric force. And keep in mind, the electric force gets stronger as charged particles get closer together, and the protons in a nucleus are very close together. As a result, the force that holds protons and neutrons together must be very strong. Well, in a brilliant stroke of imagination, physicists have named this force "the strong force." Is there a better explanation? “In Him all things hold together!”

3. The Son Is the Ultimate Purpose of All Things (v16)

- “For Him:” The ultimate meaning for all creation is to glorify Christ and to put His sovereign reign on display!

Application: This applies to both believers and unbelievers! Believers obtain salvation through faith, so as to put the mercy and love of Christ on display; unbelievers reject Christ and suffer punishment in hell for their own sins, so as to put the holiness and justice of Christ on display; Both salvation and judgement put the supreme wisdom and power of Christ on display! What does that mean for you? It’s your choice. Whether or not you believe in Him, Christ will ultimately be glorified through you.

C. The Son’s Relationship to the Church (v18)

1. The Son Is the Head of the Church (Sustainer) (v18a)

- “Head of the body, the church:” a vital metaphor -- “He is the head; the church is the body.” Head not only gives life to the body, but also controls and coordinates the operation of every part, so the whole body can function properly. Christ is the head of the church and maintains its life every moment, and the church must submit to His headship at all times.

2. The Son Is the Originator of the Church (Creator) (v18b)

- “Beginning:” Some version has “originator.” The word originally means “the beginning,” from which it derives the meaning, “the pioneer, the first among a series of persons or things.”
- “The firstborn from the dead:” It further explains the role of originator. Christ pioneered for us the new life from the dead! This is the foundation of the church and the core of the gospel!

The death and resurrection of Christ is the core of gospel. His death paid for all the sins of the believers. His resurrection defeated sin and death and gave new life to the believers. He is the author of salvation, the source of all the believers, and the originator of the church.

3. The Son Is the Ultimate Purpose of the Church (v18c)

- “He Himself will come to have first place in everything:” The grammar indicates that without resurrection, He cannot have first place in everything. But

Question: The preceding verses have already given Christ the first place of all creation. What higher place is there for Him to have? Isn't the church part of all creation? The text has already exalted Christ above all creation, and now it talks about the church. Isn't that anticlimactic?

Think: Romans 8:28-29, God causes all things to work together for good to the believers, and the good is to “become conformed to the image of His Son,” namely, sanctification, and the purpose of that is “so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren” -- to exalt Christ! **Philippians 2:6-11**, Jesus was obedient to the point of death to accomplish salvation, and so “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name...” -- to exalt Christ!

The ultimate purpose of the church -- to exalt Christ!

Application: Love the church! The church is extremely important to Christ's glory. His supremacy in all creation finds its climax in the church! He who does not love the church does not truly love Christ. If you claim to love Christ but neglect church life, and you don't regularly serve one another or worship God with other believers, then our text today is calling you to examine yourself and repent.

D. Summarizing the Person and Work of the Son (vv 19-20)

1. The Son Is Perfectly and Fully God (v19)

- “all the fullness:” full divine nature. See 2:9. Jesus is 100 percent God.

2. The Son Has Perfectly and Fully Made Peace (v20)

- “Peace,” “reconcile:” His blood is to atone for sin, so that sinners may have peace and be reconciled to God. But the scope of reconciliation here is universal -- “through Him to reconcile *all things* to Himself, ... whether things on earth or things in heaven.” What does that mean? See Romans 8:19-22. We'll discuss it next time.

Concluding Application: Maybe you've learned a lot of head knowledge today, or maybe you've learned nothing new. But remember, this passage in context is part of a prayer where Paul offered his praise to God! Let us imitate Paul and give praises to God in our prayer. Whatever you already know or have learned today, tell it to God with a worshipful heart -- that's our primary responsibility before this text. When you thus worship Him in spirit and truth, God will give you guidance in all respects of life to properly apply these precious and rich truths of Christ!