

Colossians 1:15-20

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[0 : 00] I think, in many ways, certainly in the nature of the way in which we meet, the beginning! of the fall semester really kind of marks the beginning of our year. I'm sure you feel! the same. We don't stop meeting as a church through the summer. It may surprise you. So many people who live in the area, and we come and we fellowship together and do the same things that we do, but it always feels like a bit of a new beginning. Further, this summer, there's new starts happening and shifts happening in the life of our church as Christ's Family Church has become, and you may have noticed me mentioning it earlier, has become two churches.

We didn't split and we didn't divide. We like to say that we multiplied, and we sent out members to go to Oakwood and start another church. So, if you've been gone this summer, Christ's Family Church is now really Christ's Family Church Dahlonega. So, if you hear me say CFC Dahlonega, that's what I'm talking about. This body of believers fellowship together, and right now, as we meet, I'm sure John Hoffman is bringing the heat in Oakwood.

CFC Dahlonega is certainly not changing the direction of the way that the church is going, but I want to take some time in the beginning of this semester to take a five-week break from our normal verse-by-verse exposition of the book of Acts. Step away from that for a little while to refocus and to focus us. To refocus you if you've been a part of this fellowship, if you have been hearing the preaching of the Word here, if you are aware of the way in which we function as a ministry, the vision of the church, etc., and to focus you if you're not. If you have no idea who Christ's Family Church is other than being a piece of property on the side of Highway 60 that's not easy to find, we want you to know who we are as a people and the way in which we believe God is directing us to serve in that way. Now, you may note on your bulletin that the suggestion there is that this morning was going to be a sermon on gospel identity from Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 through 14. I heard the confused murmurs when I asked you to turn to Colossians, and it was my great intention to start this five-week series this Sunday, but I want to speak as we refocus and focus with a great deal of clarity. I want to speak with laser-like precision so that there's no confusion about what God intends for us as a church. And I want the next five weeks to be axiomatic in the life of CFC Dahlonega. I would like for us to be able to look back someday at the time we'll spend together in the coming weeks and say, God began to do a work in our church and in our community in that time. And I'm just not ready for it. To speak with that kind of clarity, I decided this at 5.30 this morning. I really thought I would be when we printed the bulletins, but I'm not.

So today, as an introduction to the next five weeks, I just want to give you a clear picture of why Christ Family Church exists. And this is not a rare thing. We don't believe that we're unique in our existence as a fellowship of believers. So I want to be clear about that. But I want you to understand why the church, why Christ's church exists and why this particular expression of that exists.

My hope for this morning is that our time will be informative for you if you are new to our fellowship. It's our great desire to connect you to Christ and to His church. And if you are not new to our fellowship, that you will be reminded why we gather and why we go from this place. So you'll see up over my left shoulder, the vision statement of our church, which is Christ Family Church exists to glorify God by experiencing, proclaiming, and displaying the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

[4 : 29] And this vision statement, again, not unique to churches, but a way for us to express what we believe we need to be doing as a congregation comes largely from Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 through 20.

So let me read that, and I would ask you to follow along with me. I'm reading from the ESV translation. Paul's letters of the Colossian church, chapter 1, beginning in verse 15.

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, 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. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 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. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. Beloved, this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good, and we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Now, every part of God's Word gives testimony about Jesus Christ. That's biblical theology. God telling the story about His redemption of mankind through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In many varied ways, the Scripture points us to this great high moment in redemptive history when Jesus lived a perfect life and died a sinner's death and was resurrected and then ascended and is now with the Father.

In Luke 24, verse 27, you can read the account of Jesus' appearance to two of the disciples after His resurrection. Verse 27 reads, "...and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He being Christ, interpreted to them, the disciples, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself." In John 5, verse 39, Jesus says of the Scriptures, "...it is they that bear witness about Me." "...of all the Bible's teaching concerning Jesus, all 66 books, all of His teaching, perhaps none is more significant than the text before us today." The reality of who Jesus is demands our obedience.

[7 : 31] "...you can't say of Christ, well, He was just a good teacher. I appreciate some of what He said, and I don't appreciate other things." He claimed to be the Son of God.

So He's a liar, or He's a lunatic, or He must be Lord and obeyed as such. "...and if we are to say that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, we are not saying we are following a mere man, but rather God Himself." The reality of who Jesus is makes sure the promises of God.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1.24, "...all the promises of God." This is so significant. All the promises of God find their yes in Jesus Christ.

That is why it is through Him that we utter our amen to God for His glory. Now to our text, it is important to know that verses 15-18 are thought to be a cosmic, Christological hymn.

Big fancy words. Cosmic, Christological hymn. Many scholars believe that Paul is citing a modern hymn or confession.

[9 : 05] And the arguments to this end are interesting and varied. Now for the sake of time and for your sanity and attention, I will not explain to you why. It has most to do with sentence structure and comparison to other songs.

But fascinatingly, I believe that verses 15-18 was already music being written in the church. And Paul is simply citing this wonderful song for them.

It's important to know that. But it's more important to know that the focus of this cosmic, Christological hymn is the preeminence, or you could also say supremacy, of Jesus Christ.

He is better than everything. The preeminence or the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

And you see that in the last part of verse 18. That in everything, He might be preeminent.

Preeminent. Supreme. First in all things.

[10 : 12] Paul also states this reality in Philippians 2, verses 9-11. He says, God has highly exalted Christ and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name.

So at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under earth. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. I want us to bow at the name of Christ this morning as we consider Him together.

How should we consider the truths contained within this text concerning the preeminence of Christ?

The Puritan John Owen wrote in his book entitled, *The Glory of Christ*, the following, and I quote, The revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness that the whole creation and the just comprehension of it, if attainable, can contain or afford.

Without this knowledge, the mind of man priding itself in other inventions and discoveries is wrapped up in darkness and confusion. This, therefore, deserves the severest of our thoughts.

I love that phrase. The best of our meditations and our utmost diligence in them. For if our future blessedness shall consist in living where He is and beholding His glory, what better preparation can there be for it than a constant previous contemplation of that glory as revealed in the gospel?

[11:57] That by a view of it we may be gradually transformed into the same glory. The Christian eternity will be filled with the wonderment of Christ forever.

So we should seek to know Him now. That He might be exalted in our minds and in our lives. You could say that we might experience, proclaim, and display His excellencies.

Let me then encourage, in Owen's words, a constant previous contemplation. And to help you do so, let us consider the text together in the following structure.

Number one, and I will come back to these, but I want you to see the structure, how we're going to hang the text. Number one, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is God.

We'll see this in verse 15 and verse 19. Two, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the Lord of the universe. Verses 16 and 17.

[13:05] Three, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the head of the church. Verse 18. And fourth, Jesus Christ is preeminent because of His redemptive work.

Verse 20. So number one, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is God. Verse 15, Paul writes, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Image is the Greek word icon. You may be familiar with our English derivative of that. It means image or likeness. The scriptures refer to man as the icon of God, but we are not perfectly so.

Much like a shattered piece of glass returns a poor reflection, so it is with us. But Jesus is both the perfect representation of God and He is the manifestation of God.

Something that we can see and touch and grasp. Hebrews 1.3, the beginning part, the author of Hebrews writes, He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

[14:23] The Greek word there is where we get our word for facsimile or facts. Some of you may not know what a facts is, I'm realizing. The exact replica of His nature.

The copy and paste of God. Christ shines forth God's attributes as the sun gives light and heat to the earth.

It's real. It's real. We can touch it. It's a manifestation. Jesus is God. John 1.1, John says, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was not a God, was God.

Paul proceeds to describe Jesus as the protococcus. First born. Now, while this certainly can mean chronologically first in a family, it prefers primarily to position or rank.

From the Arians of the early church to the Jehovah's Witnesses of our day, those who seek to repudiate the deity of Jesus Christ refer to this phrase.

[15:36] But they fail completely to note its context. They fail to note the following two verses in which Paul represents Jesus as the Lord of the universe.

Specifically, verse 17, the beginning. And He is before all things. He was not created. He is the Creator. In verse 19, Paul says, For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Jesus is where all that can be known or experienced of God in this life is to be found. This is why Jesus was able to say in John 14, verse 9, Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

So Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is God. Secondly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the Lord of the universe.

Verses 16 and 17. I'll read this again because I love reading it. 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.

[16:56] And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Jesus Christ is preeminent as the Creator of all things. That is, everything that we can see and everything that we cannot see were created by Christ and for Christ.

This is a magnificent thought. It should absolutely capture our minds. Everything created by and for Christ.

John confirms this in John 1, 3. Speaking of Christ, all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

The entire universe was created by Him and for Him. In 2012, a picture was released that the Hubble Space Telescope had captured, which was the farthest ever view into the universe.

It's phenomenal. I encourage you to look it up. It's a photo that reveals thousands of galaxies, billions of light years away. The picture is called Extreme Deep Field XDF.

[18:04] You can Google that. It will come right up. It combines 10 years of Hubble telescope views of one patch of sky. They took it. They pointed it. They took pictures. They took pictures.

They took pictures. They took pictures.

They layered them together and came up with this magnificent picture reaching far, far, far out into space. Created by Christ.

For Christ. Psalm 19.1. The heavens declare the glory of God. And the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Made by Him and for Him.

Jesus Christ is preeminent as He was before all things. First part of verse 17. He's before all things. Jesus says to the Jews in John 8.58, Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

He's referencing there Exodus 3.14. Moses asked God to tell him who He'll say sent him back to Egypt. God says to Moses, I am who I am.

[19 : 09] And He said, say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you. This was an astounding claim that Christ was making. Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

He has no beginning and He has no end. He has no origin, but He is the originator of all things. Jesus Christ is also preeminent as the sustainer of all things.

The last part of verse 17. In Him all things hold together. The author of Hebrews, again, chapter 1, verse 3. The last part of it now. He upholds the universe by the word of His power.

I like to imagine that the world spoken into existence, and it will do what it was told to do until it's told to do different. Different. Not only was all things created by Christ and set into motion by Christ, but all things are sustained by Christ.

It's phenomenal that everything in the universe is made of atoms. Protons, electrons, neutrons. Fascinating stuff. Scientists have labored over the past century to explain away the existence of God, but they have failed to explain how it is that the atom remains in its state.

[20 : 33] They do not understand how it is that the atom holds together. Carl K. Darrow, a physicist, is cited in a book entitled, The Atom Speaks, in reference to what scientists are calling the strong nuclear force.

And I quote, Do you grasp what this implies? It implies that all the nuclei have no right to be alive at all.

Indeed, they should never have been created, and if created, they should have blown up instantly. Yet here they all are. Some inflexible inhibition is holding them relentlessly together.

The nature of the inhibition is also a secret, one thus far reserved by nature herself. Science has not answered this question.

What is this inflexible inhibition that's holding them relentlessly together? But the Bible does. The strong nuclear force is Jesus Christ and the word of his power.

[21 : 40] So Jesus Christ is preeminent because he's God, and Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the Lord of the universe.

Thirdly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the head of the church. Verse 18, 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.

Paul here calls Jesus the head of the body, and there are many metaphors in the New Testament used to describe the church. It's called a family. It's called a kingdom, a vineyard, a flock, a building, and a bride.

But none is more helpful in our understanding of its form and function than that of a body made of many parts with Jesus Christ as the head. This metaphor helps us to see the church as a living organism, inseparably tied together with life and mission by the living Christ.

He controls every part of it. He coordinates together the diversity of gifting and ministry. He does not merely save the church.

[22 : 54] It's an oxymoronic statement. But is the head of the church. Having saved us, he now leads us. He's the head of the body. He is the beginning.

Jesus is the originator of the church. The word therefore, beginning, Greek, archa, has a two-fold sense of both source and primacy.

So both coming from and being central to. It's a very expansive word. Beginning doesn't quite get at it. In Ephesians 1.4, Paul states that God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.

It's a phenomenal reality we'll talk about next week in our exposition of Ephesians 1. He is the beginning, the originator of the church.

He is the firstborn from the dead. Here we see that word firstborn again. The proto... I'm going to say this wrong. I'm not going to try to say it.

[23 : 59] I said it before and I think I got it right. So you can listen back in the recording. Firstborn, right? Of all who have ever been raised from the dead, this is what Paul's communicating, of all who have ever been raised from the dead, he is of the highest rank.

He's the head of the body. He is supreme in the church as such. So Jesus Christ is preeminent because He's God. Jesus Christ is preeminent because He's the Lord of the universe.

Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the head of the church. And then fourthly and lastly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because of His redemptive work. Verse 20, And through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

Now there are many ways in which our salvation is explained in the Scripture. Praise God for that. It helps us to turn it around and really comprehend the glorious truth of the gospel to us in Christ.

Many ways we are justified. We once stood before God guilty and condemned, but we are declared righteous. Not just having our sin forgiven, but also been made perfect in Christ.

[25 : 17] We are forgiven. We stand before God as a debtor, but the debt is paid and forgotten. We are adopted. We stand before God as strangers, but we are made sons.

Reconciliation is one of my favorites of these explanations. We once stood, if we were in Christ, we once stood before God as His enemies. And I think this is one of my favorites because I even now sometimes feel the inclination of my heart to be set against Him.

But because of the redemptive work of Christ, we are reconciled to God and we are made His friends. It's an incredible reality, beloved.

The Greek word for reconcile means to change in relationship. We have a religion, a faith of grace. We believe in new birth, the conversion of the soul. We don't believe that we strain by our labor to find ourselves acceptable to God.

[26 : 29] But if we have been accepted in Christ, we change in position, not degree. We're not getting a little better and a little more accepted. We are accepted. And therefore, we get a little better and we work a little more.

We pursue holiness and we reject sin. We don't change in degree. We change in position. This is what reconciliation teaches us. No longer God's enemies, but now His friends.

Paul writes in Romans 5.10, For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.

It's astounding. But not only is God in Christ reconciling us to Him, but He's also, if you look at the text, whether on earth or in heaven.

In Genesis 1.3, we see that after the world was created by and for Christ, that it was very good. But shortly after, chapter 3, all of this goodness was marred by man's sin.

[27 : 42] If you'll know me very long, and I hear you complain about allergies or some ache or pain that you have, you'll hear me say, you know why that's happening, right? And you're expecting a medical explanation, and I just say, sin.

It got woven through, that destruction got woven through the fabric of the world that we live in and experience. Right? All of that one day will be restored.

The garden is going to be made new in the new earth, and there won't be weeds, and there won't be pollen, and my knees won't pop when I bend down to work the soil.

The reconciliation of mankind is the most precious of all reconciliation, to be sure, the most central of all reconciliation, but it is just one aspect of Christ's restorative work.

Glorious. How is this that it happens? The means by which this happens? Both the restoration of God's people as well as His creation? Christ made peace by the blood of His cross.

[28 : 47] Jesus Christ became the enemy of God, and God justly punished Him for being such because He took on our sin, right?

Our sin was imputed to Him. He became sin on our behalf and then was justly punished so that we might be reconciled by faith in Christ, that He is who He says He is, and in the work that He accomplished, we would be found righteous in Him.

So Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is God. Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the Lord of the universe. Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the head of the church.

And Jesus Christ is preeminent because of His redemptive work. So, so what? For all of these reasons, Jesus Christ is of highest ranking and should be worshipped as such.

And beloved, when I say worshipped, I don't just mean in song. That word has been hijacked. All of our lives are meant to be fragrant sacrifice to the Lord.

[30 : 11] Everything we do, not just for an hour and a half-ish on a Sunday morning, everything we do is meant to be worship of the Lord.

You are always worshipping something. Yourself, another individual, stuff. But because of the great work of Christ, because of the position that He holds, all that we do should be properly aimed at Him.

Whether or not you are part of this church or ever will be, you exist to glorify God by experiencing, proclaiming, and displaying the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

Those who have been reconciled by His death on the cross rightly should do so. And beloved, this is not a burdensome task because He is preeminent.

We can cast all of our anxieties, our fears, our doubts, our troubles, our depressions on Him. There is no situation that escapes His attention or His power.

[31 : 24] There is no circumstance that surprises Him or evades His providential control. He is our confidence in life and in death.

He is the reason we can boldly share the good news of His kingdom. The reality of who Jesus is demands our obedience.

The reality of who Jesus is makes sure the promises of God. God is the Lord. So, we should set ourselves to a constant, previous contemplation of who Jesus is.

And if at the end of all that I leave you in any way going, well, how do I do that? It's what we've done this morning and what did we use as the tool for such a contemplation? The Scripture.

Contained in our Old and our New Testament, 66 books, is all that God intends for us to know right now about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is a precious, precious tool.

[32 : 38] You hear me say often, God condescended to become an author and write us a book about a real man who was also God Himself on earth.

We have such a treasure at our disposal. I want to encourage you, particularly college students, as you set yourself about your studies this semester, that you get into all the possible ologies that the University of North Georgia will offer you that you not neglect theology.

In closing, let me remind you of the words of John Owen. This, therefore, deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations, and our utmost diligence in them.

Let's pray together.