



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Jesus Christ--First Place (Colossians 1:18-20)

MARCH 23-24, 2010

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, March 23, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, March 23, 8:30 PM in Room #134**
- **Wednesday, March 24, 7am in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided

INTRODUCTION

Who is in charge here?

For a baseball team, it is the manager. For a school, it is the principal. For a company, it may be the CEO or president. For a nation, it may be the president, prime minister or a king. But even in each of these cases, as in most earthly institutions, there is a board, by-laws, or rule of law that has some type of supervision over the “one in charge.”

In this letter to the church at Colossae, the Apostle Paul has been expressing a word of praise about the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ. In the last two studies, we have seen that Paul declared that Jesus is divine, *the image of the invisible God* (1:15a). Paul also proclaimed that Jesus created all things, created them for Himself, was before the creation and continues to hold it all together (1:15b-17). Thus, answering the question of who is in charge here, by stating that Jesus is pre-eminent over all creation.

In this study, we plan to discuss the second stanza of Paul’s song of praise that honors the authority, place and work of Jesus in relation to the church.

Colossians 1:18-20 *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. ¹⁹For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰and 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.

A. HE IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH (1:18)

Scripture uses a number of metaphors to describe the church (literally, the “called-out ones”): a flock, a building, a family, a kingdom, a vineyard and a bride. In this passage, Paul calls the church a body, as he does in 1 Corinthians 12:13-27. And the head of this body is none other than the One who is pre-eminent over the universe.

As its head, Jesus is the source of the church; it is in Him that the church began (Ephesians 1:4). As its head, Jesus is the One in authority who directs, commands, calls and assigns (1 Corinthians 12:14-27; Matthew 10:1; 28:19; Ephesians 4:11). As its head, Jesus...

- ...was appointed by God (Ephesians 1:22)
- ...is the church’s foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:4-5)
- ...purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 2:18-19)
- ...sanctifies and cleanses the church (Ephesians 5:26-27)
- ...is its husband (Ephesians 5:25ff)
- ...redeems and purifies (Titus 2:14; Revelation 5:9; Ephesians 5:27)
- ...instituted the church’s ordinances (Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:19-20)

In thinking of the church’s relationship to its head, John MacArthur noted:

“The church is a Body, and Christ is the head of the Body. This concept is not used in the sense of the head of a company, but rather looks at the church as a living organism, inseparably tied together by the living Christ. He controls every part of it and gives it life and direction. His life lived out through all the members provides the unity of the Body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-20). He energizes and coordinates the diversity within the Body, a diversity of spiritual gifts and ministries (1 Cor. 12:4-13). He also directs the Body’s mutuality, as the individual members serve and support each other (1 Cor. 12:15-27).”¹

While there are pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons who are leaders in local congregations none of them are considered the head. Each of them is to be ruled by Christ by His transforming work in their own lives and by what has been laid out in Scripture.

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #134

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: WEDNESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, BROADWAY BUILDING 3RD FLOOR CAFETERIA

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B. HE IS THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD (1:18)

In the previous study covering Colossians 1:15-17, it was concluded that while the word “firstborn” could be understood as the first of its kind, it can also carry the idea of the one with the highest rank and significance; and this seems to be the best understanding of the word in both verse 15 and in verse 18.

Jesus was not the first person to be raised from the dead. He Himself raised three people during His years of ministry. The prophets Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-37) both raised people from the dead before the time of Jesus.

HIS RESURRECTION MARKED THE TRIUMPH OVER ALL THE FORCES THAT HELD MEN AND WOMEN IN BONDAGE. --F.F. BRUCE

But of all the resurrections that have taken place, the resurrection of Christ was the highest and most important. First of all, Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead without dying again. As far as I know, Lazarus is not still around and neither is the widow’s son that Elijah raised. All that were raised later perished again. Jesus, though, raised and is still alive today.

Secondly, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of all of God’s people. This is the whole point of 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul laid out the testimonies of Jesus’ resurrection and the implications for all if Jesus had not been raised. Then he writes,

1 Corinthians 15:20-22 *But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.*

In the remaining verses, he explains that we can be assured of our own resurrection because of Jesus’ resurrection. The resurrection of the others cannot guarantee this; only the resurrection of Christ. Thus, we can conclude with the Apostle, “O Death, where is thy victory? O Death,

where is thy sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55). “His resurrection marked the triumph over all the forces that held men and women in bondage.”²

C. HE HAS THE FULLNESS OF GOD (1:19)

The next characteristics that show the pre-eminence of Christ are according to “the Father’s good pleasure.” In other words, it pleased God, it made Him happy; it was according to His plan. The first of these is that it pleased God to have His fullness to “be at home permanently” in Jesus.

Paul is echoing what he said in verse 15 that Jesus is God—“*the image of the invisible God*”; a point made by Jesus Himself and other inspired writers.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

John 8:58-59 *Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.*

Philippians 2:6 *...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped...*

Hebrews 1:3a *And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.*

In relation to the created order, Jesus is supreme for He created, He created for Himself, existed before creation and continues to sustain it. In relation to the church, Jesus is supreme for He is the head; and all that God is is dwelling within Him. This “fullness” is not something that God gave to Christ as though He was lacking. Rather it is part of His essential Being, His very constitution.

Paul will make this point again in Colossians in chapter two when he writes “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form...” (2:9). The deity, majesty and glory of Jesus Christ and His work are never subjects from which Paul strays very far. For it is central to the life of the church and for the individual believer.

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D. HE RECONCILES ALL TO GOD (1:20)

The second thing in this passage that happened according to God's good, pleasing plan was for His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the One who reconciles all back to Him.

The verb translated "to reconcile" literally means "to change" or "exchange." Throughout the New Testament it speaks of "a change in relationship" (1 Corinthians 7:11, Romans 5:10).³ In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul talks about his work of an ambassador in which he pleads with people to be reconciled to God--to be changed in your relationship with God. In Colossians 1:20, Paul adds a preposition to intensify the meaning. The work of Jesus has brought a complete reconciliation of all to God.

What specifically did Jesus do to bring about this reconciliation? Paul said it was the work on the cross--"having made peace through the blood of His cross." It was not through His good teaching and excellent moral conduct. Nor was it by His miraculous work and compassionate service to the lowest of the low. It was in the shedding of His blood on the cross that pleased the Father to reconcile the world to Himself.

Romans 5:8-10 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

Hebrews 9:27-28 *And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...*

Because of the sacrifice of Christ, all things have been reconciled. Some have looked to this verse to argue for universalism; that is, the ultimate salvation of every person. But this is contrary to what the rest of Scripture teaches--that there is a hell and a punishment for those who are evildoers and not followers of Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:29-20; 13:41-50; 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43-47; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 20:10-15--these are just a few references).

If we let Scripture interpret Scripture, "all things" is in reference to all things for whom reconciliation is possible. And reconciliation is possible

only for those people who come to saving faith in Him (Romans 3:31-4:25; Ephesians 2:1-10).

The created universe is also included in "all things." Because of sin and its damaging effects on the earth, it also groans for peace (Romans 8:19-22). This peace for the creation, though it will not be fully complete until a future time, has also been purchased by the work of Christ on the cross.

CONCLUSION--HE IS FIRST PLACE

Due to His pre-eminence over creation, His headship over the church, His conquest of the grave, Paul declares that Christ has first place over all things. Thus God was pleased that Christ held His fullness and that His sacrifice brought peace and reconciliation. All of which would be "over the top" for any man; unless that man was also the "image of the invisible God." Paul's song of praise lifts up the excellencies of Jesus Christ.

Questions have been asked of the text. Now, some questions to ask of you. Jesus is Lord of creation and Lord of the church, is He Lord of your life? If you claim to be a Christian, is He truly your Master that commands, directs and empowers your words and deeds? Or do you make the claim, but simply continue to do as you please? Or do you try to do the things you know you should do with your own power and for your own glory?

Jesus is Lord of creation and Lord of the church; regardless of whether or not you actually acknowledge the truth. God has crowned Him with these crowns long before any person could ever respond. Thus, if you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, who has come to Him in faith, this Lord will become your judge. And that is not good.

But He has provided reconciliation, therefore, I plead with you (as the Apostle Paul pleaded with people) to BE RECONCILED TO GOD. Repent of your sins and trust in Jesus' work on the cross. You cannot bring peace or a "change in relationship" with God through anything else.

Therefore, I ask again: God can forgive your sins--are you interested?

¹ John MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 51.

² F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 71.

³ MacArthur, 56.