

Colossians 1:15-20 sermon notes (5/3/26)

(NIV) Colossians 1:15-20 - The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

(NLT) Colossians 1:15-20 - Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,
¹⁶for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see

and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

¹⁷He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.

Colossians Heresy (Gnosticism)

In the church of Colosse, a heresy called Gnosticism had crept into the church and was trying to marginalize Christ. It was a combination of mysticism, Jewish legalism, and Greek philosophy. The heresy taught that Christ could not be God. This belief was based on Greek philosophy which taught the spirit was good and the body was evil, and therefore God could not have become a human because God cannot mix with evil.

It also taught Jesus was an angel and that receiving him was not enough for salvation. One needed new revelation to be saved. That is where the name "Gnostic" comes from. The Greek word *gnosko* means "to know." In order to be saved, one needed secret knowledge that only the Gnostics had experienced.

The heresy attacked the very foundation of the gospel because it attacked Jesus. Though Gnosticism is not attacking the church today, the remnants of it are. Jehovah's Witnesses also do not believe Jesus is God; he is an angel, a created being. There are similar sentiments in Mormonism. Much of liberal Christianity attacks the deity of Christ as well, making him just a religious teacher and declaring he is not the only way to heaven.

Gnosticism is an umbrella term for a diverse collection of early religious and philosophical movements that flourished in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. While it often used Christian language, its core worldview was a radical departure from biblical teaching.

Basics of Gnosticism

- The name “Gnostic” comes from the Greek word *gnosko* means “**to know.**” In order to be saved, one needed **secret knowledge** that only the Gnostics had experienced.
- **Dualism:** A belief in a sharp divide between the **spiritual realm (good)** and the **material world (evil)**. The physical body was seen as a prison for a "divine spark".
- **The Demiurge:** Gnostics taught that the material universe was not created by the supreme God, but by an inferior, often ignorant or malevolent being called the **Demiurge**. They typically identified this being as the God of the Old Testament.
- **Gnosis (Secret Knowledge):** Salvation was not achieved through faith or grace, but through *gnosis*—secret, esoteric knowledge of one's own divine origin and the true nature of the cosmos.
- **Docetism:** Many Gnostics believed Jesus only **appeared to be human**. Since matter was evil, they argued a divine being could not have a corruptible physical body, suffer, or die.
- **Jesus was not God:** The heresy taught that Christ could not be God. This belief was based on Greek philosophy which taught the spirit was good and the body was evil, and therefore God could not have become a human because God cannot mix with evil.
- **Jesus was a created angel:**

Why It Is Incompatible with Christianity

Feature	Biblical Christianity	Gnosticism
Creation	The material world was created "very good" by God.	The material world is a mistake or evil prison .
Jesus	Fully God and fully human ; He truly suffered and died.	His humanity was an illusion (Docetism).
Salvation	An external rescue by God's grace through faith in Christ.	An internal awakening through secret knowledge (<i>gnosis</i>).

Problem	The fundamental human problem is sin .	The fundamental human problem is ignorance .
God	One God who is both Creator and Redeemer.	Differentiates between a high God and a lesser creator .
Resurrection	Hope in the bodily resurrection of believers.	Hope in the spirit's escape from the body.

Early Church fathers like **Irenaeus** and **Tertullian** vigorously opposed these teachings because they undermined the core necessity of the **Incarnation** and the **Atonement**. If Jesus was not truly human, His death could not save humanity.

Why is it important that Jesus is God?

It is important that Jesus is God because it is the only way the mechanics of salvation actually work. If Jesus were just a "good man" or a "highly evolved spirit," the Christian faith would collapse.

Here are the primary reasons why His divinity is essential:

1. The Value of the Sacrifice

In the Old Testament system, a sacrifice had to be "without blemish" to cover one person's sin for a time. For a single sacrifice to be sufficient for **all of humanity** throughout all time, that sacrifice must be of **infinite value**. Only God possesses infinite value. If Jesus were a created being, his death would be finite; as God, his sacrifice is eternal and all-encompassing.

2. The Bridge Between God and Man

To reconcile two parties, a mediator must be able to represent both perfectly.

- Because He is **man**, He can represent us and die in our place.
- Because He is **God**, He has the power to overcome death and the authority to forgive sins.
- **Reference: 1 Timothy 2:5** describes Him as the "one mediator between God and mankind."

3. The Revelation of God's Character

If Jesus is not God, then we still don't truly know what God is like. But because Jesus is God, we know that God isn't a distant, cold ruler; He is a God who gets dusty, feels hunger, weeps with the grieving, and is willing to suffer for His creation.

- **Reference: John 14:9** — "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

4. The Authority to Forgive

In the Gospels, Jesus often told people, "Your sins are forgiven." The religious leaders rightly asked, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (**Mark 2:7**). If Jesus were not God, His claim to forgive sins would be blasphemy or a delusion. His divinity gives Him the legal right to cancel the debt of sin.

5. Proper Object of Worship

The Bible is clear that worship belongs to God alone (**Exodus 20:3-5**). Yet, the New Testament shows Jesus accepting worship without rebuke (**Matthew 14:33, John 20:28**). If He is not God, then every Christian who prays to Him or worships Him is committing idolatry.

6. Victory Over Death

A mere human stays dead. Only the **Author of Life (Acts 3:15)** has the inherent power to lay His life down and take it up again. His divinity is what made the Resurrection possible, proving that death—the "final enemy"—has been defeated.

Why should Christ be first place in our lives? Why should he be first in our churches, our communities, and our nations?

I think we can learn a great deal from this story about Leonardo da Vinci:

Leonardo da Vinci took a friend to criticize his masterpiece of the 'Last Supper,' and the remark of the friend was, 'The most striking thing in the picture is the cup!' The artist took his brush and wiped out the cup as he said, 'Nothing in my painting shall attract more attention than the face of my Master!'

Colossians 1:15-17 is a cornerstone of Christian theology, focusing on the **supremacy and preeminence of Christ** over all creation.

Colossians 1:15 - *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

“The Son is the image of the invisible God”

1. Jesus as the "Image of the Invisible God" (v. 15)

- **Exact Representation:** The Greek word for "image" (*eikon*) implies that Jesus is the visible manifestation of the otherwise invisible God. He is not just a reflection or a "photograph" but the exact imprint of God's nature.
- *eikon* in the Greek, which means “an exact representation and revelation,”
- **The Gnostic Heresy:** Gnostics believed God was an impersonal, unknowable force far removed from humanity. This verse was originally meant to combat Gnostic teachings that suggested Jesus was a lesser, created emanation of God.
- **Paul’s Rebuttal:** By using *eikōn* (image), Paul asserts that God is not hidden. In Christ, the "invisible God" has been made fully and accurately visible. Jesus is not a distant emanation but the "exact representation" of God's being.
- **Revelation of Character:** To know what God is like—His love, holiness, and power—one must look at Jesus.
 - **Hebrews 1:3:** "The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the **exact representation** of his being."
 - **John 14:9:** "Anyone who has seen me has **seen the Father**."
 - **2 Corinthians 4:4:** "...the glory of Christ, who is the **image of God**."

“the firstborn over all creation”

2. Jesus as the "Firstborn of All Creation" (v. 15)

- **Priority and Rank:** In biblical context, "firstborn" (*prototokos*) often refers to **status and preeminence** rather than chronological birth. It signifies His rights as the heir and sovereign over everything created.
- **The Gnostic Heresy:** False teachers claimed Jesus was just one of many spiritual beings (*aeons*) or a "lesser" deity created to bridge the gap between spirit and matter.

- **Key Distinction:** Paul chose *prōtotokos* rather than *prōtoktistos* (meaning "first created"), which strongly signals that Jesus is the **Heir** of creation, not a **part** of it. This signaled Christ's **supremacy of rank** over all these supposed spiritual powers, including "thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities". He isn't a *part* of the angelic hierarchy; He is its **Sovereign**.
- **Eternal Existence:** It does not mean Jesus was the first created being. He existed before time and matter. Because He created all things, He cannot be part of creation Himself.
 - **Psalm 89:27:** (Prophetic of Christ) "And I will appoint him to be my **firstborn, the most exalted** of the kings of the earth."
 - **Revelation 1:5:** Jesus is called the "firstborn from the dead, and the **ruler of the kings** of the earth."
 - **John 1:1-3:** "In the beginning was the Word... He was **with God in the beginning**." (Confirming He is uncreated).

In Christ is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. This was especially important for the Colossians to hear as they were tempted to seek this special wisdom from the Gnostic cult. No, in Christ is all the wisdom we need for every situation in life. Listen to this story that one commentator shared:

ILLUSTRATION

Some years ago a South American company purchased a fine printing press from a firm in the United States. After it had been shipped and completely assembled, the workmen could not get it to operate properly. The most knowledgeable personnel tried to remedy the difficulty and bring it into proper adjustment, but to no avail. Finally the company wired a message to the manufacturer, asking that the company send a representative immediately to fix it. Sensing the urgency of the request, the U.S. firm chose the person who had designed the press. When he arrived on the scene, the South American officials were skeptical—the young man was obviously wet behind the ears. After some discussion, they sent this cable to the manufacturer: 'Your man is too young; send a more experienced person.' The reply came back: 'He made the machine. He can fix it!'

3. Jesus as the Agent of Creation (v. 16)

Colossians 1:16 - *For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*

- **In, Through, and For Him:** All things—visible (physical world) and invisible (spiritual beings like angels, "thrones," and "authorities")—were created by His activity and for His glory.
- **Sovereignty Over Spiritual Realms:** Paul emphasizes His authority over spiritual powers to remind the Colossians that they need not fear or worship angelic beings.
- **The Heresy:** The term *plērōma* was a technical Gnostic term for the "totality" of divine power distributed across their 30 different emanations.
- **Paul's Rebuttal:** Redefining "Fullness" (*Plērōma*): Although it appears most clearly in verse 19, Paul's logic in verses 15-17 sets the stage: All the "fullness" of God—every attribute, power, and virtue—resides in **Christ alone**, not in a series of angels.
 - **John 1:3:** "Through him **all things were made**; without him nothing was made that has been made."
 - **1 Corinthians 8:6:** "...there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, **through whom all things came** and through whom we live."
 - **Ephesians 3:9:** "...God, who **created all things** [through Jesus Christ]."

4. Jesus as the Sustainer of All Things (v. 17)

Colossians 1:17 - *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

- **Synistēmi (Consist / Hold Together)**
 - In Colossians 1:17, the phrase "all things consist" uses the verb **synistēmi** (συνίστημι), which literally means "to stand together".
- **Sustaining Force:** When used for physical things, as it is here, it refers to coherence. It suggests that Christ is the **active force** preventing the universe from dissolving into chaos.

- **The Glue of the Universe:** Jesus is the active sustainer who "holds all things together". Without His constant involvement, the universe would theoretically disintegrate into chaos.
- **Practical Application:** This truth offers comfort; if Jesus can hold the entire cosmos together, He is capable of holding together the "broken pieces" of an individual's life.
- **The Heresy:** Because Gnostics viewed matter as inherently evil, they taught that the physical world was a "mistake" created by a lower, incompetent being.
- **Paul's Rebuttal:** Paul uses *synistēmi* (hold together) to argue that Christ is the active Sustainer of the physical universe. If the material world were truly evil, Christ would not lovingly maintain its existence and order.
 - **Hebrews 1:3:** "...sustaining all things by his powerful word."
 - **Acts 17:28:** "For in him we live and move and have our being."
 - **Job 34:14-15:** Emphasizes that if God withdrew His spirit and breath, all humanity would perish (showing the necessity of His constant involvement).

Summary

Aspect	Theological Significance
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Identity	Jesus is fully God, making the invisible God knowable.
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Authority	He holds the highest rank and is sovereign over all earthly and spiritual powers.
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Origin	He is the uncreated Creator through whom everything came into existence.
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Stability	He is the "Great Fastener" who maintains the order of the physical and spiritual world.
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The temptations that attacked the church back then are the same today. Christ is a good man, a prophet, an angel; he is anything and everything other than what he said he was. The world says Christ is good but he is not enough; he is not sufficient. Listen to what C.S. Lewis said about the incredulous responses of people to Christ:

ILLUSTRATION

I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God. That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of thing Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic . . . or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. . . . You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.

Good Resource about Colossians 1:15-20

https://bible.org/seriespage/4-preeminence-christ-colossians-115-19#_ftn1