

Colossians 1:15-29

How does Paul describe Christ's relationship to the Father (v. 15a)? Christ is "*the image of the invisible God.*" Jesus has enabled us to see what God is like. God is Spirit and therefore invisible. But in the Person of Christ, God made Himself visible to our mortal eyes.¹ His being and nature have been perfectly revealed in Jesus.

How is Christ further described (v. 15b)? As "*the firstborn over all creation.*" **What does "firstborn" mean?** "Firstborn" refers to a position of preeminence. Christ is above all of creation in time and authority. What "firstborn" does not mean is that Christ was the first Person whom God ever made, which Jehovah's Witnesses teach. This is clear because vv. 16-18 state that Christ existed before all things and is the Creator Himself.

The expression firstborn has nothing to do with birth here. This is perhaps best illustrated in Psalms 89:27, where God says that He will make David His firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. David was actually the lastborn son of Jesse according to the flesh. But God determined to give him a place of unique supremacy and sovereignty.²

What is Christ's relationship to creation (v. 16-17)? Christ created everything (*by Him*) in heaven and on earth (Hebrews 1:2). He is the goal of creation – everything was created *for Him*....for His purposes and enjoyment. Christ is the Person who preserves and maintains the existence (*holds together*) of His creation which is the universe.

Note in v. 17 that Paul says, "He *is* before all things," not "He *was* before all things." The present tense is often used in the Bible to describe the eternal nature of Deity. Jesus said, for instance: "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58).³

What is Christ's relationship to the church (v. 18)? He is the head of the church which is made up of all believers, who are formed into what is known as the body of Christ, or the church. The Lord Jesus has thus a double pre-eminence—first in creation (v. 17), and then in the church, because He was the first to rise from the dead to never die again.....the first to rise with a glorified body. His resurrection is unique. It proclaims Him as supreme in the spiritual creation and is the promise that all who trust in Him will also rise. His resurrection broke death's hold on all of humanity (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).

Application: As we read "*that in everything He may have the supremacy,*" it is only right that we should ask ourselves, "Does He have the supremacy in my life?"

What does it mean that all God's fullness dwells in Christ (v. 19)? The totality of God with all His powers and attributes lives permanently in Christ (2:9). This is one of the most powerful descriptions of Christ's deity in the New Testament (Hebrews 1:3). He was fully God and fully man and still is.

What was the purpose of the Cross (v. 20)? To reconcile man to God. To make peace between God and man possible. All peace and reconciliation are a product of His shed blood on the Cross which removes the cause of hostility and alienation between man and God -- which is sin -- which is washed away by the shed blood of Christ. Now it is up to people to accept God's provision and "be reconciled" to God by faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). Although Christ's reconciling work is sufficient for all mankind, it is only effective for those who accept it by faith.

To reconcile means to restore to a right relationship, or to make peace where formerly there was hostility. The Bible never speaks of God as needing to be reconciled to man, but always of man being reconciled to God. The unsaved mind is hostile toward God (Romans 8:7), and because of this, man needs to be reconciled and brought back to God. This Jesus did by settling the sin question to God's entire satisfaction on the Cross.

What was the Colossian's former state and why (v. 21)? Before their conversion, they had been Gentile sinners, alienated from God and enemies of God in their minds as well as in their "evil behavior," i.e. both internally and externally (Ephesians 4:17-18).

How did God fix that alienation (v. 22)? He reconciled them "*by Christ's physical body through death.*" It was not by the life of Christ but by His death. His shed blood washed away their sins which were the obstacle blocking them from receiving God's forgiveness.

What is the end result of this act of reconciliation? It will be realized in a coming day when we are presented to God the Father without sin, stain or any charge against us. What marvelous grace, that ungodly sinners can be delivered from their past evil life and conveyed into such a realm of blessing!⁴

What condition does Paul add (v. 23)? *"If you continue in your faith".....* Paul was addressing a group of believers. He assumed his readers would continue in their faith because that is normal behavior for genuine believers (2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 1:6) and he is encouraging them to do so. However, perseverance in the faith is not inevitable. Apostasy/falling away is a real possibility about which he warned against here (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

At the same time, our continued salvation does not depend on our performance (continuing in the faith is evidence of genuine salvation not a requirement for it). The eternal security of the believer is a truth which is set forth clearly in the pages of the New Testament such as John 10:28, 29, which declare that no sheep of Christ can ever perish?

Note that Paul is in prison in a Roman jail while writing this letter. What is he rejoicing about (v. 24)? He knew that his sufferings were part of God's plan and he rejoiced in them knowing they were for the sake of Christ's body, namely, the church. Anytime Paul suffered for the sake of Christ, he counted it a privilege.

Paul suffered afflictions because he was preaching the good news of Christ's atonement. Christ suffered on the cross to atone for sin and Paul filled up Christ's afflictions by experiencing the added sufferings necessary to carry this good news to a lost world.

What was Paul's commission (v. 25)? As a servant of the church, it was his responsibility to make fully known the Word of God to the church.

What did the Word of God include (v. 26)? This revelation included a "mystery." This term in Scripture refers to a truth previously unknown but now revealed by God to the New Testament believers (saints).

What was Paul's new revelation (v. 27)? He revealed the secret of the mystery.....*"Christ in you, the hope of glory."* The doctrine of Christ living within every believer's heart. The amazing thing is that this is now available/offered to the Gentiles, whereas previously God's special revelation was only available to the Jews (Romans 3:1-2; 9:4).

The fact that converted Gentiles would be fellow members of the Body of Christ, admitted to the church on equal terms with the Jews, to be His companions in glory, and to reign with Him forever, was a truth never previously known.

What is Paul's purpose (v. 28)? To proclaim Jesus Christ. He did so by admonishing (counseling) and teaching for the purpose of leading the people to spiritual maturity.

We see the emphasis which he placed on follow-up work. He felt a real sense of responsibility toward those whom he had pointed to the Savior. He was not satisfied to see souls saved and then to pass on. He wanted to present every person perfect in Christ Jesus.⁵ Do we share a similar burden for new believers?

How did Paul describe his labor to present everyone perfect in Christ (v. 29)? Paul expended all his God-given strength, agonizing and struggling like an athlete in an arena (1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Timothy 6:12). The power for this struggle came from Christ (Philippians 4:13). He realized that it was only as he was empowered by the Lord that he was able to go from place to place planting churches and feeding the saints of God.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1993). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. p. 1994

⁴ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1996). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ Ibid. p. 1999