

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Truth and Error About Christ" (Part 2)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 11/1/2009

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Introduction

We're coming once again to our study of the great statement about the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ that we find in Colossians chapter one, verse fifteen: "He is the image of the invisible God," Paul writes, "the firstborn over all creation."

And we've been focusing on the two propositional statements that we find in this verse. First, what does it mean when Paul says that Jesus Christ "is the image of the invisible God"? And secondly, what does Paul mean when he says that Jesus is "the firstborn over all creation"?

And as I said last time, these two questions lead us into other vitally related questions, four in particular. First: What is the Trinity, and what is the place of Jesus Christ in the Trinity, and why is the Trinity important? Secondly: How do we know that Jesus Christ is God? Thirdly, we're going to address the question that the Muslims ask: How could God have a Son? They say that Jesus cannot be God because God cannot have a son. But as we'll see, this is a serious misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches. And fourthly, we're going to deal with a question regarding the incarnation of the Lord Jesus: When Jesus came into the world as a man, did He remain fully God? There is a great deal of error being taught about the humanity of Jesus Christ, and so we're also going to address that question from Scripture as well.

And as I've said before, these things are extremely important. They are fundamental. Christians need to know the right answers to these questions. We need

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to be ready to give an answer for the hope in the Lord Jesus Christ that is within us. And Colossians chapter one, verse fifteen is the basis on which we can know the right answers. And we've been looking at many other related passages that bear upon these questions, and we'll continue to do that today.

The Propositional Statements of Colossians 1:15

Previously in our consideration of Colossians 1:15 we examined Paul's statement that— "[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God." And we saw that the Greek word for "image" tells us that Jesus is the exact representation and the complete revelation of God the Father – so exact, and so complete, that as Jesus himself said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

We also examined Paul's second statement in verse 15, that Jesus is "the firstborn over all creation." We saw that a repeated heresy throughout church history has been the teaching that Jesus had a beginning – that He is not God from all eternity.

But we saw from Colossians 1:15 that Jesus had no beginning. He is eternal. We saw that the Greek word that is translated "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15 means "someone or something who existed before other things." It also means "someone who has the inheritance rights of the firstborn." And it also means that the person who bears this title of firstborn is in a position of superiority. So this word "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15 is not a word that has to do with birth, or birth order, or even temporal beginning. And when Paul adds that Jesus is "the firstborn over all creation," he is saying that Jesus Christ existed before anything was created. He is eternally existent.

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So the emphasis, here in Colossians chapter one, verses 15 and following, is on the absolute, the complete deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is fully God, and at the same time became fully man, and He is nothing less than that. So we see here in the first chapter of Colossians in the New Testament, why God gave the first two commandments of the Ten Commandments way back in Exodus chapter twenty – “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me” and “Thou shalt not make any image and worship it.” There is no other God besides the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And Jesus Christ himself is the image of God. When man makes any image to bow down and worship it, when man makes an idol of any one or any thing, it is blasphemy against the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Christ and the Trinity

And last time we also began to examine the doctrine of the Trinity, and the place of the Lord Jesus Christ within the Godhead. The Trinity is a foundational Christian doctrine, and it is a doctrine where even small deviations from Biblical truth can have serious consequences. And as I said last time, it is true that the word “Trinity” appears nowhere in the Bible, just as the term “the Rapture” appears nowhere in the Bible. But just as the doctrine of the Rapture of the saints – the doctrine that Jesus is coming again to take the saints out of this world – just as that doctrine is plainly taught in passages such as First Corinthians fifteen, and First Thessalonians chapters four and five – in the same way the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of one God revealed in three persons, is plainly taught in Scripture. But this essential doctrine, the doctrine of the Trinity, has become a neglected doctrine in the Evangelical church

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in recent times, and this has done great harm in the church, and we're going to talk more about that today.

A Propositional Truth

And as I said last time, we must remember that the doctrine of the Trinity is propositional truth. Just as the Bible does not set out to prove the existence of God but states it as propositional truth, as a fundamental fact, in the same way the Bible also states the doctrine of the Trinity as propositional truth, as a fundamental fact. According to Scripture, the Trinity is the one true, living, and eternal God, who is composed of three united persons of one substance and power, without separate existence. The Trinity is a doctrine that human wisdom cannot fully comprehend or explain. It can only be accepted, believed, on the basis of God's propositional revelation in His Word. And believe is what God calls upon us to do. We accept the doctrine of the Trinity because God's Word says it is so.

The Trinity in the Old Testament

And last time we also saw that the Trinity is not only a New Testament doctrine. It is very much an Old Testament teaching as well. And that is where I want to continue today. We find God mentioned as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament as well as the New.

God is identified as the Father in passages such as these:

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Deuteronomy 32:6 – Moses said to the children of Israel, “Do you thus deal with the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?”

Isaiah 63:16 – “Doubtless You are our Father... You, O LORD, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name.”

God is identified as the Son in Psalm 2, verses 6 through 12 – “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him” – in God the Son.

And just as God is identified as the Father and the Son in the Old Testament, God is also identified as the Spirit in many passages in the Old Testament:

Genesis 1:1-2 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”

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1 Samuel 10:10 – speaking of king Saul, this historical account says that “the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied...”

Also 1 Samuel 19:20 – “Then Saul sent messengers to take David. And when they saw the group of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.”

And among the last recorded words of David are these, in 2 Samuel 23:2 – “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.” This passage speaks of David as the psalmist of Israel, and it confirms that his Psalms are the inspired words of God the Holy Spirit himself.

And in Psalm 51:11, after his great sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, David falls on his face before God and prays, “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” And by the way, that is a prayer that no New Testament believer ever needs to pray. Under the New Covenant, God the Holy Spirit permanently indwells each and every believer in Christ. Ephesians chapter two and other passages tell us that the indwelling Holy Spirit is the seal, or the guarantee, of our glorious inheritance in Christ.

Job 33:4 speaks of the Holy Spirit as the One who gives physical life to a human being – “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

God is also spoken of as the Holy Spirit in Micah 2:7, where God through the prophet says this: “You who are named the house of Jacob: ‘Is the Spirit of the LORD

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restricted? Are these His doings? Do not My words do good to him who walks uprightly?’ ”

And in Zechariah 7:12, the prophet says of the people of Judah, “But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.”

The Old Testament also includes Trinitarian statements, just as the New Testament does. Isaiah 48:16-17 is one such passage. The Lord says, “ ‘Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Me.’ Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.’ ” This is a prophetic passage. Here the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, speaks of Jehovah God the Father as having sent Messiah into the world, and having sent His Spirit with Him. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all mentioned here together, as a single entity but performing different functions in the plan of redemption.

The Importance of the Trinity

Dear friend, why am I spending so much time to emphasize these things? Why is the doctrine of the Trinity, and the place of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Trinity, so important? The answer is that the doctrine of the Trinity is not merely a technicality. It

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is essential Christian truth. To believe in the God of the Bible is to believe in the Trinity. If you don't believe in the Trinity, you do not believe in the God of the Bible.

To believe in the first person of the trinity, God the Father, is to believe in the One who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Galatians 1:1 – "Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead..."

To believe in God the Father is to believe in the One who has delivered believers from the power of darkness and conveyed them into the kingdom of the Son of His love, as we saw in Colossians 1:13.

To believe in the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, is to believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal God made flesh, and thus he is qualified to be the perfect sacrifice to redeem sinners from the curse, through His blood, as we saw in Colossians 1:14.

To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe in the One who now reigns in Heaven. Acts 2:36 – "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

And in Acts 7:55-56, we read that as Stephen was being martyred for the faith, "he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' " That is where Jesus Christ

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is today. To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe in the One who is the Head of the church, as we read in Colossians 1:18. To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe in the One who ever lives to make intercession for the believer, as we read in Hebrews 7:25.

To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe in the One who is preparing an eternal dwelling place for believers, as we read in John chapter 14, where Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

And to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe in the One who will come again to judge the world, as we read in Matthew 25, beginning at verse 33. Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'... Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'... And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

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To believe in the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, is to believe in the One who is the Author of all Scripture, as we read in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20 and 21. To believe in God the Holy Spirit is to believe in the One who brought about the virgin birth of Christ, as read in Matthew 1:20 and elsewhere. To believe in God the Holy Spirit is to believe in the One who brings every believer to life in Christ, as we read in John 3:5-6 and Titus 3:4-7, and many other places. To believe in God the Holy Spirit is to believe in the God who lives in every believer. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" And to believe in God the Holy Spirit is to believe in the One who instructs every believer in the true faith, as read in First Corinthians chapter two.

Now, all of this puts the doctrine of the Trinity positively. Let me also now emphasize it negatively. Any church, or any preacher or teacher, who denies or diminishes the Trinity, or teaches a doctrine of the Trinity that is contrary to the doctrine as taught in the pages of Scripture, teaches a false god. Any church that neglects the doctrine of the Trinity, or does not teach the Trinity in its fullness, robs its people of the essential understanding of the God they worship and serve, and it places them in danger of falling into deeper error, and departure from the faith.

Dear Christian friend, there are preachers in Evangelical pulpits today, and preachers on the radio and television today, who deny the doctrine of the Trinity. They are preaching a false god and a false gospel. Beware of such men. Don't listen

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to them. Cling to the Word of God. Hold fast to the truth as it is found in Jesus Christ, who is the very image of God, and place your faith in His written Word.

And if you are not a Christian today, I pray that you will heed Christ's warning of coming judgment that I read a few moments ago. Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son. Understand that you are a sinner. Confess your sins to Christ. Confess that you need to be saved from the wrath to come. Ask God to save you. Repent of your sins, and seek to walk in newness of life by relying on God's Word. And I say to you today, not on my own authority, but on the authority of the Word of God, that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

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