

# The Image of God (#1)

*Christ In Colossians*

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**Bible Text:** Colossians 1:14-15  
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Colossians is much like Ephesians with Paul in that he writes those long flowing paragraphs, one thought after another just keeps flowing out of him until we have long flowing paragraphs, and such is true also here in the book of Colossians, which by the way, bears a striking image to that book of Ephesians, but it's a little bit different thing here. When Paul said in Ephesians, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin," he went on to describe the great wonder of salvation and spiritual blessing, but when he says that in Colossians, he taketh a different route altogether.

So look at verse 14 through verse 22 for our first text and our first Scripture reading and study "Christ in Colossians." 1:14,

14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: 15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: 16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; 20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. 21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight:

Now we're not going to be able to cover but about half of this, this morning, but I've determined not to rush for there is much here that is for our good and our benefit.

Alright, coming to consider now some subjects and some texts out of the book of Colossians. Before we consider the content of this epistle, before we look at our text proper, it will put us, I believe, in a very much better frame of mind to understand what

Paul is writing here especially with concern unto the Lord Christ, what he does, why he writes, if we first consider and understand somewhat the station and the condition of the church at Colossae, and it will help us to get some idea of the heresies that were prevalent there that Paul is overthrowing and refuting in this epistle. Therefore in effect, the false teachers that were among them actually gave Paul occasion to exalt Christ in the way that he is exalted in this epistle; the lowly heretical views that they had posited of Jesus Christ cause Paul, or gave him an occasion to exalt our Savior in the words that we have read this morning.

It is generally agreed that Paul did not found or start the church at Colossae. This perhaps is proved chapter 2 and verse 1, that they had not personally seen him in the flesh, that they had not had a sight of him. But he knew their situation and he knew it from hearing about it. In chapter 1 and verse 4, "Since we heard of your faith in Jesus Christ." Again in chapter 1 and verse 9, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you." The word of the gospel had been brought to Colossae. It had been brought there and it brought forth proof in some of them, chapter 1, verse 5 and verse 6. It was likely that a minister of theirs named Epaphros had taught them the things of Christ, chapter 1 and verse 7, that ministered among them.

Now the question is, before we enter, what exactly were the errors and the heresies in Colossae that gave Paul the concern that he wrote this epistle, and also what group was it that was responsible for propagating the errors that are there that Paul stands against? We ask ourselves the question were these strictly and only Jewish errors as we meet with in so many other places, or were there other teachings that also were mingled in with the errors of the Judaist? We read in chapter 2 and verse 8: philosophy, vain deceit, the tradition of men, the rudiments of this world, the elementary rudiments of the world. In chapter 2 and verse 18, we read of humility and a voluntary worshiping of angels intruding into those things that are invisible, trying to intrude over into the invisible world, and he adds that they were vainly puffed up in their fleshly mind. That gives us sort of a mindset of the heretics there. In chapter 2 and verse 23, he speaks of and speaks against a will-worship and neglect of the body.

Now we must recognize that all of these things mentioned were religiously done, that is, they had been brought in, tried to inculcate them into the church and into its teaching, and make them co-companions of the gospel. Then there were the standard Jewish favorites that were there, and that would be the Mosaic law and circumcision. Everywhere Judaists went, we always found them insisting upon these things, the Mosaic law be kept and circumcision be enforced upon even the Gentile converts.

Now as for the false teachers and their doctrine, who they were and such like, J. B. Lightfoot makes the case that they are a mixture or were a mixture of Essene Jews and Gentile Gnostics. In his commentary, he goes to great length to prove that this was the mixture that was there, and they had sought to combine their strange belief with that of the gospel, tried to amalgamate them in, make them one with the gospel. John Gill, another, quote, "The philosophy of the Gentile, the ceremonies of the law of Moses and some pernicious tenants of Gnosticism are here," according to John Gill. John Eadie put

it this way, "The errors promulgated at Colossae were wrapped up with important truths and were therefore possessed of dangerous attractions." For it was not an outright denial of Christ, it was not an outright denial of the gospel, but it was alluring of the person and dignity of Christ and the mixing of outward elements with the gospel of the Lord, and so like wheats and tares that are entwined together, not the dying Christ outright or wholly rejecting the gospel, but their methods were very devious and deceitful to the believer; that they were not a blatant denial of the gospel, for they greatly undervalued the person of Christ rather than deny him altogether, and alongside of the gospel, they introduced into the teaching what one called "an incipient Gnosticism," bringing all of that to bear.

And I think that's why you see Paul speaking of Christ in the way that he did, because the people there through certain mystic views, they had a mystical pietism about them, as one has called it, they put forth a sort of a system that is thoroughly mean, that is not the pure gospel of the Lord; they had a view of God that was based in mystic insights rather than the divine revelation, and as Calvin wrote in that short intro to this epistle in his book, "they invented any access to God through the angels and things drawn from books and from schools and from Plato." There were some of the disciples of Platoism that were found here in this church.

Now all these things, no doubt, Paul heard. Someone reported them to him, probably Epaphros, and he wrote this epistle while he were in prison in Rome. Colossians 4:18, I believe, substantiates the fact that this is one of the prison epistles of the apostle, and therefore the main subject, the main subject or object of this epistle and the leading or primary purpose of the things that he writes to them is that he might confirm them in the gospel of Christ and in the person and being of the Lord, that all they had need of to save them, all they need to be saved was to be found and provided in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. They had not a single need for which they must go outside of Christ in order that it be met, not only that, but the answer to their question about the origin of the world, the remedy for sin, for they scratched their heads much about that, these answers also were to be found in Jesus Christ. They needed nothing but what they had in him. In Christ they had no lack that needed any to make it up. There was no lack needing making up.

They need not go outside of him for the acquiring or meeting of any spiritual need that they had to save them and to bring them in fellowship with God, for look at what he said in verse 14, they had full and perfect redemption in him, "In whom we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins." Not only that but look, if you would, at chapter 2, verse 9, "in him," that is, in Christ, "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The very fullness of God dwelt in the person of Christ in the God-man. Again in chapter 2 and verse 10, they were "complete in him." You are complete in Christ. You have no lack. There is nothing else needful or to be made up. In chapter 2 and verse 20, they were in Christ, dead to the elements of the world. They had a better circumcision than that of the flesh, chapter 2 and verse 11.

Thus if we might sum up: they need not go outside of Christ in any wise or for anything to meet a single need to bring them into fellowship with God. And Calvin put it, "Paul

bids them rest in Christ alone, and he condemns as vanity everything that is outside of Christ." How true that is in this epistle. And as we have noted, Paul singles out by name such things as: circumcision, worship of angels, depriving the body of food, and punishing the body, that form of asceticism that some thought would rid them of evil, bring them near unto God. They thought that this would be the way of being free of sin, to punish the body and to starve it and to deprive it, for they saw sin as dwelling only in the flesh. So therefore Paul comes against these things, thus we read of these things, we understand why Paul writes what he has written and writes on the subjects that he has, and exalts Christ in the way that he does. We understand from their background, from their condition and state at the time, that false teachers and the heretics that were there why Paul writes on the subjects that he does.

Now with that in mind, let's jump into our present text this morning. Paul reminds us in chapter 1:4-7 of their initial experience in the gospel, what was declared in it, and the effect that it had upon them. In verse 4 of their faith in Christ; in verse 5 of the hope begotten in them by the word or the message of the gospel; in verse 6, it brought forth fruit in them, it was an evidence that the grace of God was in them and had come unto them; in verse 7, it was the very same thing as taught to them by their in-house minister Epaphros; then in verses 8 through 12, he expands upon the context of his prayers in their behalf. With this compare Ephesians 1 and there verse 15 through 19, Paul also prays for the Ephesians. Then in verse 12 through 14, he sums up the blessings that flow to us from the Father through Jesus Christ such as in verse 12, he has made us meet, that is, he has made us fit, he has made us qualified, he has made us suitable, he has made us competent to be partakers with the saints in light, that he has done through those that he has saved. In verse 13, working closer, he has delivered us from the power of darkness and he has translated us over into the kingdom of the dear Son of him. He has made that translation out of the kingdom of darkness, its power and such, into the kingdom of light and of his dear Son. And verse 14, in which dear Son we have redemption, even the full forgiveness of our sin; having mentioned the Son, God's dear Son, in him we have redemption. Now by and through the blood of Christ, he says, we are redeemed. He has redeemed us from our sin and again as J. B. Lightfoot wrote, "he transported us from darkness and settled us as free colonists in the kingdom of the Son of God." Then in verse 15, let us sharpen our focus and focus our wits here in this place as we, much like Moses, are about to tread upon holy ground, for there is a glory here that glows and is not consumed in the passage that is before us. The apostle have enumerated the spiritual blessing with which they were blessed in Christ, now in verse 15 begins to exalt Christ to his highest glory, declaring the great dignity and the high rank of the one that died for them upon the cross, the dignity and the high rank of this one.

Before we wade out into this deep ocean of sacred and wonderful theology, for here is one of the greatest exaltations of Christ found anywhere in the New Testament from the pen of Paul, before we do that, let us settle this point in our minds, and that is that the things that are before us were written specifically with the intention of overthrowing the error that was put forth by the false teachers among them, especially their view of creation and their claim to great wisdom of the unseen or the invisible world, this was two of their favorites. But Paul dazzles us, does he not, with the great exaltation of the

Christ of God, of that one who came from God, wore our nature and flesh, and died upon the cross, saying that our Redeemer, our Redeemer, the one that loved us, died for us, shed his blood, the one that saved us, our Redeemer is the exact image of God. Think of that, the one who has saved us is the exact image of God. Not only that, he is the Creator of all things that are not eternal, and he is the sovereign administrator and the sustainer of creation. Not only has he created it, but he guides it and he keeps it in his existence; he upholds it by the word of his power.

So looking at verse 15 and the meaning of the word "who." Now this, of course, looks back to the word "Son" back in verse 13 who is none other than Christ, his dear Son, and now he will speak further of his dear Son in verse 15 and following. "Who," let's catch that as we will speak something concerning God's Son. But notice again also the tense, "Who is" the Son. "Who is," that is, even now, for you notice the tense is not "it was," or even "he shall be," but it is in the present, "who is." Thus the words here "who is" are prominent, prominent in order to expand upon the one called the Son of God.

The Son of God who is, and Paul speaks of the Lord's Christ from two aspects in verses 15 through 17: his relation to God and creation. First of all, he is the image of God, and secondly, verse 18 through 20, of his relationship to the church, he is the head of the body. Now first in verse 15, the first part, Paul dazzles us when he calls Christ "the image of the invisible God." God's dear Son, who is the image of the invisible God. This is no oxymoron, that is, it is not a contradiction, but how can one be an image of one who is invisible? Some fool might ask, "How can there be a visible representation of one who himself is and always has been invisible?" And yet both of these things are declared in the Scripture.

1. It is declared that God is indeed unseen. He is called here the invisible God. Also in 1 Timothy 1:17, invisible God again. For John 1:18, no man has seen the Father, seen God, at any time. John 6:46, and not seen God. 1 John 4:12 and 4:20, or even at Mount Sinai back in Exodus. Deuteronomy 4:12 declared they heard a voice but they saw no similitude; they did not see a form or an outline, a bodily form of God. No shape or form of God did they see at Mount Sinai. This has tempted the pagans both in and out of Christendom, that God is invisible and unseen has become a temptation to pagans in and outside of Christendom to build them some sort of material gods that they can see. This they did in Romans 1:23, they made them gods out of created things.

But secondly, we notice also that Christ is the very image of God, so our text "image of God." 2 Corinthians 4:4, Christ who is the image of God. Paul there in mentioning Christ throws in that great appellation "who is the image of God." Hebrews 1:3, being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person. My, what a text is that. Gill wrote on Colossians 1:15, quote, "When Christ is called the image of God, it refers not to form or shadow or shape but someone of nature and perfection." That's what it refers to, his nature and his perfection.

And an equality with God and a point here to concede, it is Jesus, Jesus in his mediatorial office and person that Paul calls the image of God. Not the Son before Incarnation but

Jesus in his mediatorial office and work. Not just in his pre-Incarnate existence, even as he dwelt in the flesh among men on the earth, he then is the very image and the likeness of God. He not only came from the Father but he also said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." John 14:9, John 10:30, he made that wonderful claim, "I and my Father are one," for which the Jews hated him and sought to kill him. Yea, he was God manifest in the flesh. 2 Timothy 3:16, God manifest in the flesh. Even when he was born, at his birth in Bethlehem he was said to be Emmanuel, God with us in Matthew 1:23.

So let us notice something about the passage that we've referred to in Hebrews 1:3 that would put us somewhat in the same mind of the text that we are upon here in Colossians 1 in that in Hebrews 1:1-2, having spoken unto us in his Son, by whom God has spoken, then Hebrews 1:3, "Who," that is the Son who is, not was or will be but who is, "the brightness," or the effulgence or the outshining, he is the outshining, he is the brightest beam, the splendor of God's glory, the express image of his Father, that is of God's person, some render it "an exact representation of the Father's nature." That's what the writer is saying of our Lord.

Now consider these various ways that these words have been translated that we understand all the better, for they are very weighty. Hebrews 1:3, you'll find them translated variously by various expositors and by various versions of the Scripture in such ways as these. "The radiance of his glory and the exact image of his substance." Again quote, "An emanation of his glory, an express image of his substance." Another, quote, "The radiance of his glory and the impress of his substance." Quote, "The effulgence," that is the radiance, "of his glory and the stamp of his substance is the Lord Jesus Christ." Owen used these descriptions, "He is the brightest beam or splendor of the glory and the express image of the character of God." John Owen.

He is the express image of his Father's person, the exact likeness of him, and let us again remind ourselves that the apostle is not saying these things only as to the divine nature of our Lord, nor only to the human nature by itself, but he speaks of the person of Christ as to his hypostatic union, that he is both God and man, hypostatically unionized in the one person. Now he's not two persons sharing one body, but he has two natures but is one person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So in Hebrews 1, the apostle declares what the Son is in respect to the Father, which is this: "the brightness of his glory and the exact image of his person." Look at what that says, the brightness of his glory, the exact image or hypostasia of his person, the thing being the Son Incarnate in the hypostatic union as the God-man, God and man, there is both a real manifestation and a real representation of the Father in him. Thus we can say an amazing thing, that in the eternal Son becoming Incarnate, he did so manifest the Father God, he did bring him so near that men saw and heard and handled of the word of life. 1 John 1:2, he came in the flesh, we have seen, we have heard, we have handled. Some had the blessed privilege of touching the Lord Jesus Christ and seeing him in his Incarnation, but the apostle has more wonderful things to say of Christ.

Look at 1:15 of Colossians again or the last part where he denominates or refers to Christ as "the firstborn of every creature." Here it is best for us to go slow and to go sure lest we stumble here in our haste, because at first sight and by first impression, those words, some have taken these words to mean that Jesus himself had a beginning. Many of the Arians and others have used this text to prove that Jesus himself was but a created being; that Jesus had a beginning; that he was among the very first created beings of the hand of God, maybe the first of all God's creation, they say, which if I mistake not, was the view of that old heretic Arius in days gone by, for Arius taught the Logos was the firstborn and created of God who became Incarnate in Christ but then Arius said, quote, "There was when he was not." In other words, there was a time when Christ was not, when Christ did not exist, taking away his eternality, making him a created being. Paul will have none of that in the Colossian epistle because such of you destroys both the eternality as well as the deity of our Lord. Beside, can he be created who is himself called Creator? Can he created himself? And again, Paul had in the previous phrase called Jesus the very image of God, and this comes not with or by or through creation, but by originality. God cannot replicate himself. He cannot create another like unto himself. He will not make a copy or a duplicate of himself. He will not do such a thing.

How then and in what sense is Jesus the firstborn of all creatures? How is it? What does that mean, Jesus the firstborn of every creature for the simple word "also" means the firstborn. Luke 2:7, Mary brought forth her firstborn son and lay him in a manger. Also Matthew 1:25. Also at Exodus 4:22, Israel is called God's firstborn. He redeemed them out of the land. Exodus 13:2, all firstborn were sanctified unto God, both men and beast. Firstborn sanctified unto God. Numbers 3:13, "All the firstborn are mine."

Now of old, the firstborn had a special right and privilege and rank in the family. You look at the Old Testament, you'll find that to be true. Deuteronomy 21:16, the firstborn son took predominance and precedence in the family. Genesis 25:29, if the father be absent or dead, it was the firstborn son moved into the place of the priest of the family. And the word for "first" here in our text, *prototokos*, has the meaning of foremost whether in regard to time or to place or to order of importance. That's one of the meanings of the word.

So let's notice Colossians 1:18. Christ is again referred to as "the firstborn from the dead," though he was not the first in order to be raised up from the dead. Others were dead and raised before he was, but in a certain sense, he is the firstborn from the dead. Revelation 1:5, because by his own power he came out of the grave. None other ever did that. In Romans 8:29, he is the firstborn among many brethren.

Now methinks that help is close at hand to give us a very very strong hint as to how we're to understand the expression "firstborn" here in Colossians 1:18, "who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, in order that in all things he might have the preeminence." Firstborn, first in that sense. This word "preeminence" is some five times in the New Testament and it means "to be first; first in rank; first in order." The same word is translated "preeminence" in Colossians 1:18, but it is rendered "chief seats," chief seats in Matthew 23:6 and Mark 12:39. It is rendered "uppermost seats" in Luke 11:43, and the

"highest seat" in Luke 20:46, that is, seats of honor, seats of preeminence, seats of rank and high order. Uppermost seat. Thus by calling Jesus the firstborn of all creation or of every creature, Paul is declaring not that God created Christ first but he is stating the preeminence and the supremacy and the priority that Christ has in the mind of God, just as stated in Psalm 89:27, "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth," in rank and honor and in preeminence, having precedence and priority over all other things.

A man named David Pitcairn wrote in his treatise called "The Anointed Savior" in the year about 1846 these words, quote, "It conveys an idea of the unspeakable superiority which belongs to Jesus Christ as the result of his relationship to God." He is of first priority. He is made the Sovereign of all creation. He is the depository of all power. He is the possessor of all privileges. He is the heir of all things. God has made him so. He is King of kings. He is Lord of lords. All judgment is committed into his hand.

My, what a preeminence does our Lord have. As the firstborn, Christ has a superiority similar to that enjoyed by a firstborn in a family of Israel of old in such things as, 1. the firstborn had a double portion went to him. The firstborn received a double portion. Second, the subjection of all to the firstborn or eldest son was practiced of old. Thirdly, the eldest acted as priest of the family at the behest of the father or the absence of the father. Thus the Lord has preeminence in all things.

John Eadie understood Paul here to be saying the firstborn in reference to the whole creation and acts in the Father's name and in the Father's interest, may I add in the Father's authority, that the Lord acts under the authority or in the authority of his Father, and as God's firstborn, as the preeminent one, all and any and every transaction, especially salvation, are through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Yes, all those transactions pass through the Son of God. One put it such transactions with Christ, quote, "are equivalent to direct transition or transaction with a Sovereign Father." He that has seen me, he that comes to Christ, comes to God and such like, so that all, none can come to God except by and through Jesus Christ.

As God's firstborn, he manages all the affairs of God in regard to all creation. He is the Sovereign over all things. He is made Lord and Christ. He is given sovereignty over all. Every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father. This is our preeminent Lord.

Paul gives this exalted view of Christ for some reasons, in closing. 1. To refute the errors and the heresies concerning Christ, and there must have been many, too many for us to set forth in our study, but he sets forth the Son of God as the remedy for all of those errors. Secondly, he writes to establish the saints in the faith of the Son of God and in the gospel, that redemption is and only by him that all spiritual needs are met in and through God's Son. And I'll close by saying it again: we need not go outside of Christ for any need spiritually. There's not one need that necessitates us going outside of Christ that it might be met, for it pleased God that in him dwells the fullness of the Godhead. He is fully God and we are complete in him. He's the very image of God. He is the only way to



God. He has redeemed us by his blood and brought us out from under our depravity and our condemnation.

Now I'll close by saying the one who has saved you, he is no ordinary man. He's the very image of God. He has all preeminence. He's the very image and visible likeness of the Father. In him dwells the fullness of the Godhead. So our Savior is that mighty and wonderful one, our Savior is God and has saved us by his death upon the cross. Thank God for the wonderful exalted view of Christ in this epistle.

Alright, please, let's stand.