

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: Answering Islam's "Great Objection" to Christ

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 11/29/2009

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Today we conclude our focus on Paul's great inspired statement about Jesus Christ in Colossians chapter one, verse fifteen: "He [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."

Now as we have seen, these few words tell us two things. First, the phrase, "He is the image of the invisible God," tells us that Jesus Christ is fully God, and nothing less than fully God. Secondly, the phrase "the firstborn over [or the firstborn before] all creation" tells us that Jesus Christ is eternally God. He existed and He was God before anything was created. He was fully God, in eternity, before the existence of time itself, because time itself is a creation of God.

Now as we have seen, many people object to this doctrine. They deny this doctrine. They deny that Jesus Christ is God. The liberal church skeptic does this, the cults do this, other false religions do this – all those who refuse to accept the Bible for what it is – the Word of God, man's sole authority for faith and life – they also deny the deity of Jesus Christ.

And my purpose over these last several messages has been to equip you to be able to answer this question when someone asks it of you: "How do you know that Jesus Christ is God?" And over the last several messages, my purpose has been to prepare you to answer that question, not on your own authority, but on the Bible's authority, because only the Bible is God's inspired, infallible, inerrant Word. Only the Bible can be trusted absolutely to give us the right answer, to tell us the truth about Jesus Christ.

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And now I want to take up one last point in this equipping process. I want to equip you to answer the great objection to the Christian faith that is put forth by Muslims, the followers of the false religion of Islam. At least they *think* it is a great objection. That is going to be our focus today.

How Can God Have a Son?

One of the main reasons that Muslims reject Biblical Christianity is the fact that they cannot accept the idea that God could have a Son. The Muslim says, "How can God have a Son?" It's impossible. It's blasphemous. But there is a problem even with their question. The problem is that their concept of sonship is a naturalistic one. In order to produce a son, they say, God would have to engage in a physical relationship with a wife. They consider this idea to be the worst sort of blasphemy.

But the fact is, Muslims totally misread and misunderstand the Bible on this point. Even the Old Testament Scriptures, which the Muslims claim to revere, speak of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Earlier in this series of messages, we discussed some of those passages, such as the second Psalm, in some detail.

What Muslims do not understand, refuse to understand, is that the Bible teaches that the sonship of Jesus Christ is a *relational* sonship, not a *naturalistic* sonship. God did not *produce* a son, in the natural sense of a human father participating in the physical act that results in conception. No, that is not the Sonship of Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that God has *always been* the Son, from all eternity. Being born of

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the virgin Mary did not make Jesus Christ the Son of God any more than it made Mary the wife of God. The purpose of the virgin birth of Christ was to facilitate the entrance of the eternally existent, sinless Son of God into the world in human form, in order to die for sinners.

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was not born of a physical union between a man and a woman. At Gabriel's announcement of God's choice of Mary to be the mother of the Messiah, recorded in Luke chapter one, we read in verse 34 that she could only say in wonderment, "How can this be, since I do not know a man [I am a virgin]?" And Gabriel gave God's answer to her — and it is the answer to all men, whether you are a sincere questioner about this matter, or a blasphemous denier of the deity of Christ. In the very next verse, Luke 1:35, the angel Gabriel says this: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God...For with God nothing will be impossible."

And Mary, submitted to the supernatural nature of that which was about to take place. She responded, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the Gospel of Matthew, chapter one verses 24 and 25, record that Joseph, Mary's husband, "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her [in other words, he kept her a virgin, their marriage relationship was not physically consummated] until she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus."

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The problem of the Muslim is at its core the same problem as the liberal skeptic. It is the denial of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, God the Son. The denial of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a matter of simple unbelief. The Bible makes it very plain exactly what God did, how God brought the eternally existent Son into the world in human form, to save sinners.

And God calls upon all men to have the same attitude that Mary expressed in her words, and Joseph in his deeds: "Let it be to me according to Your Word." As Paul puts it, "Let God be true but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). But many Evangelicals today, and the liberal skeptics of the mainline churches, along with the world's 1.5 billion Muslims, all simply refuse to submit to God in this vital matter of doctrinal truth. This is especially ironic for the Muslim, since the very name of his religion — Islam — means "submission" or "surrender". The Muslim is not in submission to God and His Word, at the most basic and fundamental point of doctrine, the deity and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Son of God from eternity. Micah's prophecy of His birth in Bethlehem, in Micah chapter five, verse two, says that Jesus' "goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" — literally, "from the days of eternity." Micah in the Old Testament tells us that Jesus Christ is eternally God. And as we saw in a previous message, Jesus, referring to Himself as the Son of God the Father, said to the Pharisees, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). And we also saw that Jesus is called "the Son" in the Old Testament before His incarnation, for example in Psalm two verses 7 and 12.

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Jesus' own teaching in the Gospels speaks exclusively of the eternal relationship between the Son and the Father. He never speaks of a sonship that had a beginning point. He never speaks of a sonship based on physical conception and birth. The relationship between God the Son and God the Father is a relationship of subordination. Jesus said, in John 6:38-39, "I have come down from Heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of...the Father who sent me." And on the night before He went to the cross, in John 17:5, Jesus prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

He is indeed, as Paul tells us in Colossians 1:15, the very "image of the invisible God, the firstborn over [the pre-existent One before] all creation."

Now, what I've given you in the last few minutes is the basic answer to the Muslim. Jesus Christ is not the Son of God in a naturalist way. He is God the Son in terms of His relationship to God the Father, within the Godhead, the Trinity. And the Old Testament prophecies, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, and Jesus' own teachings during His earthly ministry, all point to those facts.

But before we leave this subject, I want to give you more ammunition, if you will. I want to give you more facts and resources from the Word of God, that will equip you to better understand and defend the doctrines of the deity of Jesus Christ and the Sonship of Jesus Christ. So I want to give you six additional points. These all have to do with the meaning that the Bible gives to the title, "Son of God."

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A Separate Person

Point number one: A son is a separate person from his father, and the Bible always maintains that kind of a clear distinction between Jesus as the Son and God as the Father. We see this, for example, in John 5:19-22:

Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son."

Also we see this in John 6:38-39. Jesus said,

I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

Not a Servant, But an Heir

Point number two: The relationship between a father and a son is not that of a servant to a master, but that of an heir to one who bestows an inheritance. In contrast to his father's servants, a son is his father's heir. The Bible speaks of this many times. Let me just mention one of these passages, Hebrews 3:5-6:

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And Moses indeed was faithful in all His [that is God's] house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

And earlier in Hebrews, in chapter one verses 2 through 14, Jesus is set forth as the Son and the Heir, but in contrast the angels are called servants or ministers. This is the point: Subservience to a father is not the Biblical idea of the Sonship of Jesus Christ. The term "Son of God" does not mean "subservient to God." Christ is not a servant, but an heir. And because believers have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, in Galatians 4:7 Paul tells us, "Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Because Christ is the heir of a glorious inheritance, we are partakers of that inheritance because we are in Him, as adopted sons of God.

A Son Has the Same Nature as His Father

Point number three: A son always has the same nature as his father. And that is the point of that first phrase of Colossians 1:15 – "He is the image of the invisible God." Jesus Christ is the exact representation of God the Father. He is of exactly the same nature as God the Father. If you're going to claim, as some do today, that Jesus only became the Son of God when He was born of Mary, then in order to be logically consistent, you would have to say that Jesus was not God before He was born, and the Bible plainly teaches that He was. And throughout His ministry, in many passages in

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the Gospel accounts, Jesus declared that He has exactly the same nature as God, and that He is equal with God.

The Son Who Was Sent

Point number four has to do with the way in which the Bible always speaks of the coming of the Son of God into the world to redeem sinners. It always speaks of the Son as having been sent into the world. The New Testament uses that word "sent" to describe the coming of God the Son into the world, over fifty times. Jesus Christ could only have been sent into this world if He already existed.

Galatians 4:4 – "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law..." John 5:24 – Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes on Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life." First John 4:14 – "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world." John 3:16-17 – "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but [he sent Him in order] that the world through Him might be saved."

First John 3:8 speaks of the appearance or the manifestation of the Son of God: "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." The Greek word for "manifested" means to make visible, or to bring to light, something

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that was previously hidden. This verse, like the others that use the word "sent", declares the fact that the already existing Son of God was made manifest or appeared on earth in order to carry out the work that God the Father had given Him to do.

The Unchangeable Son

This brings us to point number five: Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God because the Bible declares that Jesus Christ is unchangeable. Hebrews 13:8 tells us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Again, this speaks of the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ. His divine nature has never changed and will never change. He was the Son of God in eternity before time, He was the Son of God when He entered time and space in a human body, and He always is and will be the Son of God, because *being* the Son of God is the essential nature of His Person.

When Jesus came into the world, He took on a human body, but Philippians chapter two makes it clear that His divine nature did not change, and his relationship with the Father did not change. That relationship exists from all eternity. That relationship existed before Jesus came into the world. That relationship existed while He was in the world. And that Father-Son relationship exists now in Heaven as Christ intercedes with the Father on our behalf. And that Father-Son relationship will continue in the eternity of the new heavens and the new earth.

In John 20:31, the apostle tells us that his purpose in writing his gospel account was so that you might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life through His name." John does not say that Jesus *became* the Son of

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God but that He *is* the Son of God. The fact that Jesus was and is the Son of God is an essential aspect of Who He is, and what He did in offering Himself as the full and final atonement for sin.

The Father-Son Relationship: Redeeming Love

Let me give you final point, number six: We can only really, fully understand the love of God for us as sinners when we understand the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. John 3:16 – “God so loved the world” – loved the world so much – “that He gave His only begotten Son” – sent Him into the world to suffer and die the most cruel death imaginable, and to suffer separation from His Father on the cross – so “that whosoever believes on Him” – Jesus Christ, God the Son -- “shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The Father-Son relationship in the Godhead tells us the full measure of the love of God for sinners. The fact that God the Father took His very own Son, His only Son, the very Son He loved from before the foundation of the world, and sent Him to be a sacrifice for our sins – and the fact that Jesus Christ, God the Son, went to the cross willingly, in submission to the Father, saying, “Not My will, but Thy will, be done” – this is the greatest act of love and mercy and grace imaginable.

Let me ask you a question: Are you experiencing that redeeming love today? Are you trusting in God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as your Savior from sin and eternal death? If not, I invite you to bow before Him in your heart right now, wherever you are. You may be listening at home, you may be driving in your car, you might be out

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jogging, you might be listening to this message on an airplane at 35,000 feet. You might be in a hospital or a nursing home.

It doesn't matter where you are, or who you are, or what you are doing. If you haven't truly been born from above, if you haven't confessed to God that you are a sinner, if you haven't asked God to apply the shed blood of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ to you, to wash away your sins forever, you need to do that, without delay. And so I encourage you, I urge you, to call upon the Lord to save you, right now.

About the Broadcast

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