

The Exaltation of Jesus Christ

Colossians 1:15-17

Colossians 1:15-17 - *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”*

Background Notes

One reason for Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae was that false teaching had begun to circulate in that area. This false teaching was a mixture of Judaism and Gnosticism, and it lowered the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. According to this false teaching, Jesus Christ is not fully God; thus He is not fully supreme, and He is not all-sufficient.

Thus the theme of Paul’s letter to the Colossians is the supremacy of Christ and the all-sufficiency of Christ. In this letter, any false teaching about the Person and work of Jesus Christ was refuted - whether it was false teaching by the Gnostic Judaizers of the 1st century AD, or the false teaching of the cults today.

After his prayer for the Colossian believers (v9-14), Paul began one of the greatest Christological passages in the entire Bible. This passage just magnifies the work of the Lord, the preeminence of His position, and the wonder of His Person and life. In verses 15-22, Christ is exalted in every verse! What do verses 15-17 teach us about Christ?

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the “Firstborn” over everything.

Verse 15: *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”* What does the term “firstborn” mean? Does it mean that Jesus Christ is less than God because He was “born,” and therefore He’s merely a creature? That’s what the Jehovah Witnesses teach. No, the term “firstborn” does not mean that Jesus was born first in time. No - it means He is **first in position**. He’s **preeminent**. He’s the **Head** over all creation.

Let’s look at four sub-points from this passage that emphasize that the word “firstborn” does not mean “born first in time,” but rather “first in position.”

a. The whole point of the entire passage, and indeed the whole book, is to show that Christ is supreme over everything because He is fully God. If “firstborn” means born first in time, and thus only a lofty creature, the whole argument breaks

down. This is especially true since the phrase containing the word “firstborn” immediately follows the phrase “*He is the image of the invisible God.*” This phrase emphasizes the fact that Jesus is fully God – and as God, He is eternal, not a creature born in “time.”

Jesus Christ was not just an “emanation from God,” as the Gnostics were saying. The idea in the word “*image*” is the idea of an *exact and perfect representation*. And it certainly means more than just “likeness.”

Sometimes we use an expression in reference to a son who closely resembles his father: “He’s the ‘spitting image’ of his father.” What does that expression mean? It means that there’s more than just a likeness between the son and his father. It means we can see the father in the son - same appearance, same mannerisms, same personality. What is God like? Look at Jesus Christ. He is the express image of God - because **He is God**. Jesus said, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9).

b. If God wanted to convey the idea that Jesus was firstborn in the sense of created first in time, there is another Greek word that could have been used. There is a Greek word meaning “first created,” but the Holy Spirit who inspired this text did not use that word. He did not use “first created.”

c. The verb in verses 15 & 17 is in the present tense. “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,*” and “*He is before all things.*” If the idea was “born first in time,” then the past tense certainly would have been used. The idea of priority in time, as well as priority in rank, and the phrase “He is before all things” are all involved in the phrase “firstborn.” The fact that the present tense is used in both cases emphasizes the timelessness of deity. The Lord Jesus said, “*Before Abraham was, I am*” (John 8:58).

d. The end of verse 18 is a summary statement: “*that in all things He may have the preeminence.*” The Lord Jesus is Head over creation and Head over the church. At the beginning of verse 18 we read, “*And He is the head of the body, the church,*” and at the end of verse 18 we have the summary statement: “*that in all things He may have the preeminence.*” In other words, He is Head (preeminent) over creation, and He is also Head (preeminent) over the Church.

So clearly the word “firstborn” does **not** convey the idea of “born first in time” in this context, but rather “firstborn in position.” The Lord Jesus Christ is firstborn – He’s #1 – He’s preeminent - **over everything!**

2. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator of everything.

Verse 16: “*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*” How can the Bible say that Christ created all things when it also says that God created all things? The simple and obvious answer is: **Jesus Christ is fully God!** God the Father is the ultimate source of all creation, but God the Son is the active agent of all creation.

As Hebrews 1:2 says, *“Through whom also He made the worlds,”* meaning through whom (the Son) He (the Father) made the worlds. And the first few verses of John 1: *“In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”*

Everything in the universe was created by Christ. The universe did not come from nothing, the universe did not create itself, and the universe is not eternal. It was **created**. Everything - visible and invisible - was created by Christ, including the angelic host mentioned here as “thrones and dominions and principalities and powers.” The lower sphere beings were not created by the higher sphere beings as the Gnostics taught. No! **Everything was created by Christ!**

The evil angels are mentioned here as well. They were not created evil - they were created good, but they became evil with the fall of Satan. Originally, all things were created good, and for the glory of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice verse 16: *“All things were created through Him and for Him.”*

3. The Lord Jesus Christ is the sustainer of everything.

Verse 17: *“And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist,”* – consist, or hold together. What’s behind the forces that hold the atoms together? What’s behind the universal Law of Gravitation? The Law of Gravitation says that any two bodies in space are attracted by a force that is proportional to their mass, and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. Why does that Law of nature work? It works because Christ is the sustainer of this universe. It works because of the power of the living Christ, the eternal Son of God. He is the preserver and conservator of all. He is not only the creator of **all** things; He is the sustainer of **all** things.

Practical Application

Are we fulfilling the purpose for which we were created?

Verse 16: *“All things were created through Him and for Him.”* That includes you and me! We did not come into existence by chance. We did not come into existence through evolution. We came into existence through creation, and therefore we are responsible before our Creator. We answer to our Maker.

What is our responsibility to our Creator and Maker? We were created by Him and for Him - to bring Him glory. Are we fulfilling the purpose for which we were created? Do we bring glory to Jesus Christ in the way we use our time and energies? Do we bring Christ glory in our thought lives?

We exist for Him. All things were created through Him and for Him, and that includes you and me. Are we fulfilling the purpose for which we were created?