

**PREFACE**

The church in Colossae is being systematically coaxed away from the supremacy of Christ Jesus by false teachers that would seek to diminish Him, relegating the “firstborn” of God to the company of lesser created beings, and emphasizing the importance of pure knowledge over faith. In these two verses—vs16-17—Paul continues and expands on his thesis that Christ is all in all, and superior to *any* other created thing.

And I think it is helpful to keep in mind something that A. W. Tozer once wrote. His thesis was on the attributes of God—specifically, in this quote, the holiness of God—but his remarks apply as well to this context where we are considering the supremacy of Christ Jesus.

We cannot grasp the true meaning of holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. God’s holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, His attributes are holy; that is, whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holy.

For us it is important to remember that Christ is not just the best of the best, one degree higher than the highest archangel. No, He is supreme over all creation in ways beyond the mind of man to comprehend. [\[as in a SciFi movie, in which the one critical element is removed and the universe collapses in on itself, remove Christ, and the universe collapses—ceases to exist.\]](#)

If this paragraph [\[vs15-20\]](#) answers the previous paragraph [\[vs9-14\]](#), these two verses answer v15. *Paul, what do you mean when you say that Christ is the “image of the invisible God” and “the firstborn of all creation”?*

**Read Colossians 1:15-17.****v16****For by (in) Him...**

In this study I am coming to appreciate prepositions, for they play an important role in Paul’s (and others’) efforts to explain Christ. There are three in this verse, each of which expresses subtly different aspects of His relationship with creation.

For **by** Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created **through** Him and **for** Him. (Colossians 1:16)

Most popular versions except the ESV translate this word “by”; the NASB adds the margin note, “Or ‘in’.” It makes sense that the translators would harmonize this with how the verse ends: “all things have been created *through* Him...”—that word [\[dia\]](#) meaning “the channel of an act.”

This word is *en*, and translating it “by” expresses Christ’s relationship with creation in an *instrumental* sense: How did I trim the oak trees? *By [means of]* a chain saw. How did God create the universe? *By [means of]* His firstborn.

This responsibility of Christ in the act of creation—the *instrument* of creation, or the One who actually did it—can of course be substantiated elsewhere in Scripture. This is what is expressed in the familiar passage that opens the gospel of John.

### Read (without turning) John 1:3

In John 1:3 the “through” is the same word translated that way in the next preposition in Colossians 1:16: *dia*.

Most commentators, however, prefer to think that Paul is saying something else here, and that “in Him” is the appropriate translation. Remember our discussion on the phrase in v10: “increasing in the knowledge of God”—that is, knowledge of God is the *sphere* or realm in which spiritual growth takes place.

If we apply that interpretation here in v16 we arrive at a marvelous, mystical thought that expresses the centrality of Christ to all things: all of creation took place—and is still taking place—within the sphere of Christ. Or “in reference to” Christ.

*Vincent’s Word Studies*: ...putting the fact of creation with reference to its sphere and center.

In Him, within the sphere of His personality, resides the creative will and the creative energy, and in that sphere the creative act takes place. Thus creation was dependent on Him.

The beloved Son is the nucleus, the navel, the reason for everything that exists! If so—and this is why Paul is declaring this—how is it possible that the Colossians are entertaining teaching that would not just fail to exalt Christ Jesus, but actually *diminish* Him?

### *all things were created*

What did He create? There is nothing He *didn’t* create.

**all things** = *ta panta* = the entire universe

### *...both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible,*

**heavens and earth** = everything in the entire universe (cf. Genesis 1:1)

**visible and invisible** = perhaps a restating of “heavens and earth,”

i.e., visible = earth, invisible = heavens. On the other hand, there are visible things in the heavens: stars, constellations, planets; and there are invisible things on earth: energy, oxygen, the souls of men. So maybe the best way to read this is, *He created everything above and below, whether we can see it or not.*

### *whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*

It follows that if Christ created everything that is, that would include even the supernatural, angelic creatures—all part of the “invisible.”

In our second session I described the various heretical teachings being presented to the church in Colossae, a part of which was a certain Jewish mysticism that included among other things (perhaps) worship of angels or (perhaps) participation with angels in the worship of God. Gnosticism also contributed to this in its philosophy of “mediating beings.”

Although the four categories mentioned in this verse can be applied to human, earthly institutions, the consensus is that this refers to categories—a hierarchy—of spiritual, angelic beings. Paul addresses this head-on in Chapter Two.

**Read Colossians 2:9-10.**

**Read Colossians 2:15.**

**Read Colossians 2:18.**

The emphasis in Chapter Two is on Christ’s demonstrated *power* over these authorities. But in Chapter One Paul sets the stage for this by pointing out that Christ was the one who created them in the first place. Of course He has power over them; He *made* them.

*all things have been created through, by<sup>kjv,niv</sup> Him...*

The second preposition is *dia*, translated “through” except in the KJV and NIV. The word means “the channel of an act,” so “through” is really the better translation. We turn on the lights in a room by flipping the wall switch. When we do that the electricity flows through the wires from the switch to the light fixture. The wires are “the channel of the act” to illuminate a room.

We mustn’t forget that there was and is purpose behind all of this. The universe was created through Christ; so what?

**Read Hebrews 2:10.**

“Bringing many sons to glory.” There is the reason for it all.

*and for (toward) Him.*

The word translated “for” is *eis* (ace), which has as its primary meaning “to or into, indicating the point reached or entered.” So, once again, although all the familiar versions translate this “for,” the word in this context encompasses far more than we might deduce from that translation. We might interpret “for” to mean

- for Christ’s glory
- for His benefit
- for His exaltation

Absolutely true—but there is more. If we think of this as meaning Christ is the “goal” of creation, we get closer to the fullness of the thought. Curtis Vaughan puts it this way:

Creation is “for” Christ in the sense that He is the end for which all things exist, **the goal toward whom all things were intended to move.** (emphasis added)

Alexander MacLaren writes

All things come from and tend towards Him. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending. All things spring from His will, draw their being from that fountain, and return thither again.

And that's the important take-away from this. Note the flow of this verse, which expresses the totality of Christ Jesus in creation:

- all of creation sprang into being within the realm of Christ;
- He was the channel through which it flowed
- He is the purpose and goal of creation.

He is, indeed, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is all in all.

Listen to how *The Message* paraphrases Ephesians 1:7-12.

Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth. It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. (Ephesians 1:7-12, *The Message*)

## v17

V17 is a more succinct restating of v16—but also includes a new thought.

### Read v17.

*He is before all things...*

And speaking of tiny words packed with meaning, I love the second word of v17: "is." The "before" of v17 refers to time; Christ *predates* all things. That being the case, wouldn't we expect to see, in an English translation, "He *was* before all things..."? After all, humanly speaking, the time before creation was certainly in the past, so we would expect it to be expressed in the past tense. But this is not humanly speaking; it is God-speaking. So that little two-letter word beautifully expresses the timelessness of the eternal Son of God: He *is* before all things...

This is not unlike what Jesus said to the Jews when they challenged His statement about Abraham being glad to see His day.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."  
(John 8:58)

[The word *pro*, translated "before," can mean "in front of," or "superior," but is rarely used so in the NT, and the apostle Paul always uses it to express time. So here it speaks to Christ's preexistence (Moo).]

*...and in Him all things hold together.*

Note first our familiar yet powerful two-letter preposition: "in"—as in all of creation sprang into being *within the realm of* Christ. *In* Christ *all things*—seen and unseen, the entirety of the known and unknown universe,

**hold together, consist**<sup>kjvs</sup> = *sunestēken* = from <G4862> (sun) and <G2476> (histemi) (including its collective forms); **to set together**, i.e. (by implication) to *introduce* (favorably), or (figurative) to *exhibit*; intransitive to *stand near*, or (figurative) **to constitute** : - approve, commend, consist, make, stand (with); **to place together and here to cohere, to hold together; sustain.**

Notice how well this rebuts the Gnostic position that matter is evil. A. T. Robertson writes

Christ is the controlling and unifying force in nature. The Gnostic philosophy that matter is evil and was created by a remote aeon is thus swept away. The Son of God's love is the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe which is not evil.

As John Lightfoot put it in the 1600s, Christ is "the principle of cohesion" who makes the universe "a cosmos instead of a chaos."

Albert Einstein spent the last 30 years of his life trying to prove a unified field theory—a complete explanation of the universe tying together electricity, magnetism, gravity, and quantum mechanics. His attempts were grounded in the belief that all physical phenomena should ultimately be explainable by some underlying unity.

And, ultimately, he failed.

The unification theory is, essentially, an attempt to explain the entirety of the universe—and everything that occurs within it—by one easily understandable law.

(*Reflections by the Pond* #387, March 23, 2009: "In Everything, God")

Well, we can help them out with this. Here is the unifying law: Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews expresses this in a slightly different way:

**And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.** (Hebrews 1:3a; emphasis added)

Amazingly, by simply "the *word* of His power" the Son upholds everything that is.

**upholds** = *phero* = a primary verb (for which other and apparently not cognate ones are used in certain tenses only; namely, *oio*, oy'-o; and *enegko*, en-eng'-ko); **to "bear" or carry** (in a very wide application, literal and figurative, as follows) :- be, bear, bring (forth), carry, come, + let her drive, be driven, endure, go on, lay, lead, move, reach, rushing, uphold.

These two verses in Colossians give us a beautiful, eloquent picture of not just the *supremacy* of Christ, but the overwhelming *totality* of His creative and sustaining role in the universe—and proof that He alone is the one, essential element.