

PREFACE

Based on our text in Colossians One, who is Christ Jesus? He is

- the rescuer (v13a)
- the transport (v13b)
- redeemer (v14a)
- the image of God (v15a)
- the firstborn over all creation (v15b)
- creator (v16)
- eternal, outside of time (v17a)
- sustainer of all things (17b)

And now in this session we will continue this extraordinary paragraph by looking at

- Christ's relationship to the church;
- His rightful place in every aspect of our lives; and
- how He is not just the one essential element in the universe, but the one essential cog in the gears of God's plan for humanity.

v18**Read Colossians 1:18.**

He is also...

Along with everything itemized earlier, Christ is also...

head of the body, the church;

How important is the head to the human body? Well, if I lose my finger it will hurt—but I will live. If I lose an arm or a leg it will hurt—but I will live. If I lose an eye, an ear, my nose, it will hurt—but I will live. But if I lose everything from the neck up I will *not* live. The head is essential to the body; it is the one external component that is required for life. (And even if one could live without a head, what kind of life would it be? Sentience would instantly cease; one would cease to *know* one was alive.)

Read Leviticus 17:11.

The Lord told Moses that the life is in the blood. The life of the church is the blood of Christ. It is His atonement that makes the church possible at all, and it is His blood—His life—that holds it together. Just as the members of a human family are bound together by their common blood, the members of the spiritual family of the church are bound together by the common, unifying blood of Christ.

But that is just one aspect of Christ as the “head” of the church. Pastor Joshua Moody points out that a synagogue is not a church, a Mormon temple is not a church, a Jehovah's Witnesses gathering is not a church. None of these (and more) are churches because Christ is not their head. [The “Jesus” of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is not the Jesus of God's word the Bible.]

Yes, Jesus is the lifeblood of the church, but more to this point in Colossians is the fact that Jesus is its Chief, its Leader—its Lord. He *rules* the church; it is His. This church does not belong to the pastor, or the elders, or the original members who erected its building. This Sunday School class does not belong to me, or you, or anyone else. It all, lock stock and barrel, belongs to Christ Jesus. He is our one and only Lord. This is why it is so critical, so vital that everything this church (as well as the universal church) does and says squares with Scripture. We do not subscribe to the Mormon position that there are new revelations through prophets today; we have God's completed and inerrant word, added to only by the Holy Spirit moving in believer's minds. But even the moving Spirit cannot work contrary to God's written word.

Here is how F. F. Bruce summarizes it:

So far as the organic relationship is concerned, Christ and His people are viewed together as a living entity: Christ is the head, supplying life and exercising control and direction; His people are His body, individually His limbs and organs, under His control, obeying His direction, performing His work. And the life which animates the whole is His risen life, which He shares with His people.

and He is the beginning...

beginning = *arche*. Not just present at the start of all things, not just instrumental. He **is** the beginning: the origin, the source of all things.

Read Revelation 3:14.

the firstborn from the dead

This does not mean that Christ was the first person to be raised from the dead. He Himself did this for Lazarus. But Lazarus' raising from death has no bearing on what happens to others; but that *Christ* was raised from the dead means that those who are in Him will be raised as well.

However, if we take as a whole this context, there is a sense in which Christ *was* the first to be "born" from the dead. Lazarus eventually died—he eventually went the way of all flesh. Christ was truly the first resurrected *to eternal life*. And it was He who became the template for the resurrection of all believers who will be bodily resurrected never to die again.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-24.

so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Now we get to the nub of it. *Why* is Christ all of these things—firstborn, image of God, creator and sustainer, head of the church, firstborn from the dead?

so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

first place^{nasb}, **preeminence**^{kjvs,esv}, **supremacy**^{niv} = *proteuo* = from <G4413> (protos); *to be first* (in rank or influence) :- have the preeminence.

Sidebar: There is a reason the NASB adds "Himself" ("so that He Himself"). Normally the "He" (*autos*) is implied by the word endings in the Greek. But here it is included as a word in the text, which means it is emphatic: He *alone*, He Himself.

There are two scopes to this statement.

Eschatological (end times)

There “will come” a day when Christ Jesus will have preeminence over all people [*pas can also be translated “all men”*]. There will come a day when absolutely every person and thing will acknowledge Him for who He is. That day is not yet here.

Read Hebrews 2:7-8.

As the writer of Hebrews puts it in the next verse, Jesus was made “for a little while lower than the angels,” and the earth remains fallen and in the hands of the evil one. But that will not last forever.

Read Philippians 2:9-11.

In that moment Christ will literally, physically be “Lord of *all*”—even those who up to that point had denied His lordship. In Colossians it says He “*will* come to have”; that is, it has not yet happened. In The Revelation John sees it happening.

Read Revelation 11:15. [*“has become”*]

And in his vision John saw also the new Jerusalem, to which all the glory that had previously been apportioned to the rulers of the earth will be given to the glory of the Lamb.

Read Revelation 21:22-24.

Temporal, personal

That is all some time in the future. The more immediate application of this statement applies to each of us this very day—and while it may be more understandable than the eschatological application, it remains a more difficult challenge to implement.

It is easy enough to nod our heads in agreement, acknowledging that at some day in the future Christ will reign not just over the heavens and earth, but over every heart of man. For the fulfillment of that truth is out of our hands; it is inevitable no matter what we do.

But do we have the courage to ask ourselves,

Does Jesus Christ “have first place in everything” in my life?”

In my e-mail signature I include a Latin term I got from R. C. Sproul: *coram Deo*, which means literally, “before the face of God.” This is how Sproul summarizes it:

Living *coram Deo* is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.

Here is how Sproul expands on it:

To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God. God is omnipresent. There is no place so remote that we can escape His penetrating gaze.

To be aware of the presence of God is also to be acutely aware of His sovereignty. The uniform experience of the saints is to recognize that if God is God, then He is indeed sovereign.

Living under divine sovereignty involves more than a reluctant submission to sheer sovereignty that is motivated out of a fear of punishment. It involves recognizing that there is no higher goal than offering honor to God. Our lives are to be living sacrifices, oblations offered in a spirit of adoration and gratitude.

To live all of life *coram Deo* is to live a life of integrity. It is a life of wholeness that finds its unity and coherency in the majesty of God. A fragmented life is a life of disintegration. It is marked by inconsistency, disharmony, confusion, conflict, contradiction, and chaos. The Christian who compartmentalizes his or her life into two sections of the religious and the nonreligious has failed to grasp the big idea. The big idea is that all of life is religious or none of life is religious. To divide life between the religious and the nonreligious is itself a sacrilege.

This means that if a person fulfills his or her vocation as a steelmaker, attorney, or homemaker *coram Deo*, then that person is acting every bit as religiously as a soul-winning evangelist who fulfills his vocation. It means that David was as religious when he obeyed God's call to be a shepherd as he was when he was anointed with the special grace of kingship. It means that Jesus was every bit as religious when He worked in His father's carpenter shop as He was in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Integrity is found where men and women live their lives in a pattern of consistency. It is a pattern that functions the same basic way in church and out of church. It is a life that is open before God. It is a life in which all that is done is done as to the Lord. It is a life lived by principle, not expediency; by humility before God, not defiance. It is a life lived under the tutelage of conscience that is held captive by the Word of God.

(R. C. Sproul, "What Does 'coram Deo' Mean?" *Ligonier Ministries*,
[HTTP://WWW.LIGONIER.ORG](http://www.ligonier.org))

Let me be clear: I include "*coram Deo*" in my signature not because I have *attained* to such a life, but that I have embraced that philosophy as my highest calling. Every day I fail at it, but every day I also affirm it as my highest purpose while remaining on this earth.

Now, with all this in mind, let's reread our passage.

Read Colossians 1:15-18.