

# Preeminent Christ

*March 2, 2025*

## Lesson Summary

### **Main Passages**

Colossians 1:15-23

### **Session Outline**

1. Firstborn of Creation (Colossians 1:15-17)
2. Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18-20)
3. Working in Our Lives (Colossians 1:21-23)

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### **Theological Theme**

No one is greater than Jesus. Everything was created by Him, through Him, and for Him, and He holds everything together. He is central, and He should be the most important person in our lives.

### **Call to Action**

Don't move on from Jesus, there is nobody like Him. Get to know Jesus. Do you know His power and preeminence? For non-Christians, reconciliation with God comes only through the preeminent Jesus. There is no other way to be saved.



## Leader Guide

# Preeminent Christ

### Introduction

Have you ever stopped to think about the incredible details in nature?

When we look at the wonder of creation, as believers, we can't help but think about the power and greatness of our Creator. In our text today, Paul wrote about Jesus's role in creation. Every created thing was created by Him, through Him, and for Him. Jesus is sovereign and foundational to our faith, and we'll dig more into Paul's writings on the person of Jesus in our study today.

- ❓ What in creation draws your mind to the greatness of God?
- ❓ Why is it important that we take time to notice these things and allow them to lead us to meditate on God's power and goodness?

### Session Summary

Today's passage is an in-depth look at the person of Jesus: who He is and what He has done for us. Jesus is a mirror image of God, and God is revealed to us through Him. He is supreme and sovereign over all creation, and everything was created by Him, through Him, and for Him. He existed before all things and He's the reason our lives and world function. As its head, He has authority over and is the source of the church. Jesus is permanently divine. Before we were saved, we were alienated from God, but because of Jesus's atoning work on the cross, we are reconciled to God, presented as "holy, faultless, and blameless" (Colossians 1:22).

### 1. Firstborn of Creation (Colossians 1:15-17)

- ❓ What does it mean that Jesus is "firstborn over all creation" (v. 15)?

Paul was prompted to write this letter after learning from Epaphras that the true gospel was under threat in Colossae because of false teaching. So far in his letter, Paul had established himself as credible to teach them and told what he'd prayed for them: that they would understand God's

will for their lives and experience spiritual growth. Paul also reminded the Colossians that God rescued them from the darkness of Satan's dominion and brought them into Jesus's light (v. 13). Jesus has paid for the forgiveness of our sins (v. 14).

In today's passage, Paul wrote about the centrality of Christ. Paul used this section to explain who Jesus is and the work that He has done on our behalf. Modern scholars call this study of the person of Jesus "Christology." Knowing who Jesus is and what He did for humanity should inform how we live as believers. Paul knew this was a foundation that the Colossian believers desperately needed. The doctrine of Christ was threatened by the false teachers in Colossae, but Paul sought to help them have a correct understanding. It was important for them to understand Jesus rightly because of the false teaching among them. And it is just as important for us in a world where false teaching not only exists but is also more accessible than ever. When you understand the truth, you can better spot a lie.

Notice how verse 15 begins a different format of the text in your Bible. Most scholars believe this was a portion of a poem or song about Jesus in the early church,<sup>1</sup> and Paul used this method to more fully explain Jesus to these believers. Let's break down what Paul said verse-by-verse.

**"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation"** (v. 15): When Paul wrote that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God," he used the Greek word *eikon*, which means that Jesus is a mirror image of God, represents God to us, and is also a manifestation of God (God is revealed fully to us in the person of Jesus).<sup>2</sup>

Jesus being the "firstborn" doesn't mean He was created, it indicates His status. The New Living Translation presents this concept helpfully: "He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation" (v. 13). This phrase was heavily used in early Christian debates about the nature of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

So, what does this mean for us? We better understand God by knowing Jesus. He is supreme and sovereign over all creation, and as believers, that should translate to our personal lives.

**"For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him"** (v. 16): Jesus wasn't a created being; everything was created by Him. Our

## The Hymn

Many think that 1:15–20 was a pre-Pauline hymn that Paul used and applied for the Colossian situation. Whether reworked or original, this hymn helped Paul present Christ as preeminent in relation to the entire creation and in relation to humanity and the church because of His resurrection. This hymn or early creed celebrated Christ as the sovereign Creator and Redeemer of all things.

entire universe exists because of Him: the peaks of the highest mountains, the deepest depths of the sea that no human eye has ever seen, every beautifully complex being, the wonders of the cosmos that we can't hope to know the fullness of in our lifetimes.

- Based on these verses, how does everything in creation point to Jesus at some level?

Scholars believe Paul mentioned “thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” in direct response to the nature of false teaching the Colossian congregation was hearing, which seemed to have falsely emphasized angels and created a hierarchy involving them.<sup>4</sup> Paul debunked this false teaching by sharing the truth of Jesus’s authority: everything was created through Him and for Him.

**“He is before all things, and by him all things hold together”** (v. 17): Paul summed up Jesus’s sovereignty over creation: Christ existed before every created thing, and He sustains creation. Simply put: He is the glue that holds everything together!

- Application: What do these verses tell us about Jesus’s role in our world and lives?

## 2. Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18-20)

- What does it mean that Jesus is the head of the church? How should this affect our lives and relationships today?
- What do you think it means for God to “reconcile everything to himself” through Jesus (v. 20)?

Paul continued his rich teaching on Jesus in this passage, describing Jesus’s relationship with the church. Let’s walk through those specific points.


**“He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything”** (v. 18): “Church” here refers to the collective body of believers, not a specific congregation. Christ is the “head” of the church both in the sense that He has authority and is sovereign over it, and that He is the source of the church, like the head of a river.<sup>5</sup> We get the same idea from Jesus as the “beginning” of the church; He is the source of everything. With His death and resurrection, He gained victory over death. Christ is central.

**“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or**


**things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross”** (vv. 19-20): The Gnostics, whose ideas were part of the false teaching being spread in Colossae, believed power was split between various beings. But Paul emphasized the divine power of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> God always had a plan for our salvation, and that plan was Jesus.

The word Paul used for “dwell” here emphasized a permanent situation: Jesus is permanently divine, and through Jesus, we are reconciled to God (John 14:6). This reconciliation is made possible because of Jesus’s work on the cross, where He shed His blood and died for our sins. God took pleasure in this because it was His plan all along.

Jesus is supreme. Jesus is central. No one is greater than Jesus.

 Application: How would your life look different if you truly viewed Jesus as central in everything you said and did?

### 3. Working in Our Lives (Colossians 1:21-23)

 In these verses, Paul spoke directly to the impact of Christ’s preeminence in our lives. What are some specific ways Paul said Jesus has impacted the lives of believers?

 How did Paul live as a servant of the gospel?


Before we knew Jesus and had a relationship with Him, we were “alienated” from God. The corrupt thoughts in our hostile minds bear fruit in the form of evil actions, or actions that aren’t aligned with God’s will or plan for us. Paul also spoke to this idea when he wrote about the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. When we are separated from God, the hostility in our hearts and minds is expressed through these actions.

Even in our alienation, God had a plan for our salvation: Jesus. In verse 22, Paul again stressed Jesus’s role in our reconciliation. We are reconciled because Jesus died on the cross for our sins. This wasn’t a situation where we checked boxes of good deeds and earned reconciliation. No, we can’t earn salvation. We were alienated. Jesus did all the work, and now, thanks to God’s abundant grace, we have transitioned from bearing bad fruit and being destined to be cut off and thrown in the fire (John 15:1-8) to being “holy, faultless, and blameless before him” (v. 22).

Before we accepted the gift of salvation, we lived in the dark, in the domain of Satan, but God rescued us from the grip of sin and darkness through Jesus. After salvation, believers are under Jesus’s authority and domain.

Verse 23 hit the direct issue relating to the Colossian believers: syncretism. Syncretism happens when you combine ideas from different religions. The Colossians were at risk of shifting away from the gospel and becoming a melting pot mixing the gospel with the pagan religions around them. Paul's advice was simple: "remain grounded and steadfast in the faith" (v. 23). Our hope comes from the truth of the good news of Jesus, not by jumping on the bandwagon society promotes.

Paul said he was a servant of the gospel. He put the gospel first and himself second, enduring beatings and forgoing personal preference so that the gospel might spread. We are called to live in this same way.


 Application: What does it look like to be a "servant of" the gospel in 2025?

## Conclusion

Our text today includes a thorough presentation of the person of Jesus. One of Paul's main points of emphasis was Jesus's sovereignty. Sovereignty means to have ultimate power or authority. When we reference Jesus's sovereignty, we mean that everything was created by Him, through Him, and for Him (Colossians 1:16), and He is in loving control over all everything. Colossians 1:17 tells us Jesus is the glue that holds everything together. He is sovereign and central, and that is true in both creation and the church.

In his letter, Paul sought to fight the problem of syncretism in Colossae. Because of false teachers, the congregation was at risk of merging the true gospel with false ideas. This isn't the only place we see this in the pages of Scripture. It can be tempting to think that this was a first-century problem, but even today, this is still a problem when we put any barriers up between people and the true gospel. The true gospel is Jesus plus nothing. Christ is central.

 How does our text today shape your understanding of who Jesus is and how we should live our lives?

 What are some safeguards we can put into place in our lives to make sure that we aren't falling into the trap of false teaching? How can we support one another in this effort as a group?

 Who can you tell about Jesus by sharing about His preeminence in all things?

## Prayer of Response

*Close in prayer, thanking God for Jesus's centrality in all things and for His redeeming and reconciling work in our lives. Ask for a greater focus on Him that shapes our lives each day.*

## Memory Verse

*He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.*  
—Colossians 1:17

## Additional Resources

- *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* by Douglas Moo
- *Philippians, Colossians & Philemon* by Richard Melick
- *Be Complete* by Warren Wiersbe

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples





# Historical Context of Colossians

## Purpose

Paul wrote to counter the “Colossian heresy” that he considered an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The false teaching is identified as a “philosophy” (2:8), presumably drawn from some Hellenistic traditions as indicated by the references to “his fullness” (1:19); the “elements of the world” (Gk *stoicheia*, 2:8, 20); “wisdom” (2:3, 23); and “self-made religion” (2:23). In addition, the false teaching contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11); “human tradition” (2:8); Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation (2:16); the “worship of angels” together with “access to a visionary realm” (2:18); and harsh human regulations (2:21–23). Paul addressed this syncretistic philosophy by setting forth a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by noting appropriate implications for Christian conduct.

## Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

## Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

## Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

## Extended Commentary

### Colossians 1:15-23

1:15 The word image refers to an exact visible representation of something or someone. Thus, Jesus the Son represented the invisible God of the OT (Jn 1:18, see word study at 2Co 4:4, p. 1843). Jesus also represented sinless humanity (Gn 1:26–27). The title firstborn does not mean that Jesus was created (v. 16), but indicates his priority of rank as supreme over all the created order.

1:16 Christ is supreme over creation because he is the Creator. Paul’s mention of thrones ... dominions ... rulers, and authorities may refer to four classes of angelic beings (possibly directing human affairs). This may be a corrective against the false teaching promoting the worship of angels (2:18). Thus Paul asserted the supremacy of Christ over all creation because all things were created through him and for him.

1:17 All things refers to everything created (v. 16). The preposition before most likely is a temporal reference to the preexistence of Christ before creation. The phrase by him all things hold together presents Christ as the one who sustains all creation.

1:18 Paul used the word head in both a literal and metaphorical sense (2:10, 19). Literally “head” implies authority, rule, and supreme rank. Metaphorically, it plays on the imagery of Christ’s relationship to the church as head of the body (1Co 12:12–27; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23). He is the head because he is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead. The parallel language to the creation (v. 15) identifies the church as part of the new creation that was inaugurated with the resurrection of Christ. His resurrection resulted in the fulfillment of God’s purpose for Christ that he might come to have first place in everything.

1:19–20 God was pleased that his fullness, the entirety of God’s being, would dwell in the Son. Thus Jesus was fully divine as well as fully human. God took pleasure in this because, through Christ, God would reconcile (reestablish a right relationship) all things to himself on the cross (cp. Rm 5:11; 2Co 5:19).

1:21 Paul explained the need for reconciliation to God by appealing to the Colossian believers’ spiritual condition before their salvation. Before they heard the gospel they were alienated from God. Corrupt thinking results in immoral behavior, which in turn produces more wrong thinking and further estrangement from God.

1:22 Paul contrasted the Colossian believers’ former life with their current salvation. The reference to Jesus’s physical body highlights his humanity, whereas v. 19 expresses his divinity. The purpose of this reconciliation is so that believers may be presented holy, faultless, and blameless before him instead of being “hostile in your minds” and practicing “evil actions” (v. 21).

1:23 The only way believers will be presented holy, faultless, and blameless is if they do not abandon their faith in Christ as presented in the gospel. Faith refers to the content of the gospel with Jesus as the object (vv. 4, 23; 2:5, 7, 12). Paul warned the believers at Colossae about their adoption of syncretistic beliefs that perverted the true message of the gospel, subsequently abolishing their hope (v. 5).<sup>7</sup>

## References

1. David Guzik, “Colossians 1 – The Greatness of Jesus Christ,” Enduring Word, accessed January 6, 2025, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/colossians-1/>.
2. Guzik, “Colossians 1.”
3. Naomi Cramer Overton, ed., “Colossians 1:15” in *NLT Every Woman’s Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2024), 1512.
4. Guzik, “Colossians 1,” <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/colossians-1/>.
5. Guzik, “Colossians 1.”
6. Guzik, “Colossians 1.”
7. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1894–1895.