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COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Last week when we began our study in the *Book of Colossians*, we said that one of the false teachings that had invaded the church at Colosse was gnosticism.

Well, one of the teachings of gnosticism was that a holy God could not come in contact with evil matter, and that there had to be a series of “emanations” from God to His creation.

They taught that Jesus was **only one** of these emanations...by the way, the word “emanation” simply is defined as “an issuing forth.” So, these false teachers didn’t see the Lord Jesus Christ as fully divine God, but rather they saw Him as an emanation from God. **And that He was an emanation way on down the line.**

In other words, here is God...and here comes an emanation from Him...and then here comes an emanation from **that** emanation, and an emanation from **that** emanation, and every time something is issued forth from God it is a little more removed from God and has a little bit less of God in it.

And the Gnostics taught that Jesus was just **one** of many of these “issuings forth.”

But, Paul attacked this heresy head on in the passage we have before us today. The Lord Jesus Christ is **not** one of many emanations. The Lord Jesus Christ is **preeminent**. He is first in **rank**. He is first in **influence**. There **is** none greater. He is the **preeminent Son of Almighty God!**

And that’s what we will see today. The Lord Jesus Christ is first in **all** areas of life, but we’ll see today that Paul sets forth **four areas** that He is first in.

Verses 15-18...

The word that points up best the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is in **verse 18**. The *NAS* that I just read from translates the *KJV* word “preeminence” to **“first place.”** And that’s exactly what it means...but I love the word **“preeminence.”**

Years ago in the faculty lounge of Mid-America Seminary, before they moved out to Germantown, someone had hung this verse. It just ran across one wall of that room.

And it said, **“...that in all things HE might have the preeminence...”** This is the motto of Mid-America. And this is so true at Mid-America. In all things done there He indeed **does** have the preeminence.

This verse doesn’t say Jesus has **prominence**. No. If Jesus had prominence, this would indicate Jesus was **important**, but there might be something or someone else that was **equally as important**.

For example, Jesus may be prominent in your life, but your **job** might be prominent as well. Jesus may be prominent in your life, but your **family** could be just as important to you as Jesus.

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And when you really stop and think about it...this is the way it is with most professing Christians. Jesus is very **important** to them...Jesus is very **prominent** to them...but there are also **other things and other people** who are just as important and prominent in their lives.

John 12 tells us of folks who believed in Jesus, but they were afraid to confess Him because of what the Pharisees would think. See, Jesus had a **prominence** in their lives, but they didn't allow Him to be **preeminent** in their lives!

But, the word **preeminent** doesn't mean **prominent**. In the Greek, the word **preeminent** means **first in rank or influence**. Kenneth Wuest translates it **having priority to and sovereignty over all creation**.

If Jesus is preeminent in your life, there is absolutely nothing that holds an equal **place or rank or influence or priority** in your life compared to Him. Simply put...**it means that He holds first place in your life!**

And Paul sets forth four areas of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ...

1) Jesus is preeminent in **character...verse 15...**

Now, you and I may see someone's child and say something like, "He is the image of his daddy." That means that child holds a very strong resemblance to his father. **But, this is a stronger meaning of the word image in verse 15.**

Jesus said, "**He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.**" I believe Jesus was saying, "**I am the visible expression of the invisible God.**"

The writer of **Hebrews** tells us...

"Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature and upholds all things by the word of His power."

And if you want to see the invisible God you must look at the visible Christ. Jesus Christ is God. He is not a God. Jesus Christ is God!

This is what made the religious leaders of Jesus' day so angry. They knew perfectly well that Jesus claimed to be God. And they charged Him with blasphemy because of it. But, it's not blasphemous to tell the truth!

Verse 15 also tells us that Jesus is the first born of all creation.

See, the Gnostics were saying that Jesus came along somewhere down the line. There was God and then there were angels and then there was creation and somewhere down the way Jesus came into existence. And Paul is writing this epistle to refute this heresy!

John 1 says what? "In the beginning was the Word..." Now, the Gnostics said, "Oh there were many beginnings. God began here and then He began there and then He began again and then He began again."

But, John said, "**In the beginning was the Word...**"

Which beginning was this? Just pick one! At any beginning you want to pick, Jesus was already there! He **always has been**. He is **now**. He **always will be**. He is the **eternal** Christ Jesus. He did not begin at **Bethlehem**. He did not end at **Calvary**. **He is the eternal Christ!**

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I love what Bro. Bob says when he speaks about Jesus being the great "I Am" as God is the great "I Am"... Bro. Bob says, "He **am** in the past. He **am** in the present. He **am** in the future. He just **am!**"

Having said that, I believe his phrase "firstborn of all creation" doesn't refer to **time** as much as it refers to **rank**.

For example...In **Exodus** and also in **Jeremiah**, Israel was called God's **firstborn**. Now, we know that Israel was not the **first people born**...but they held **first place** in God's sight among all the nations.

He is the visible expression of the invisible God.
He was in existence before any beginning of any creation.
He is Lord of all!
He is preeminent in His character!

And...

2) He is preeminent in **creation...verse 16-17...**

Uh-oh...the Bible must be contradicting itself. I thought **God** was the Creator. **Genesis 1:1** says, "In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the earth..."

Here it says that in Jesus were all things created. Going back to the **Gospel of John** we would see, "**All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.**"

Well, that covers everything, doesn't it?

Colossians 1:16 covers everything, too, doesn't it? It says that Christ created **all things**...all things **visible**...all things **invisible**...all things **in the heavens** and **all things on the earth**.

Paul went on to say that Christ created all **thrones** and **dominions** and **rulers** and **authorities**. This means angels... There are ranks of angels...ranks of both good angels and bad angels.

And Paul was setting forth to the Colossians that contrary to the teaching of the Gnostics...the Lord Jesus Christ was not an angel or any other created being...He in fact created **all** created beings including the angelic world!!

When we get to **chapter 2**, we're going to see that Paul specifically refuted angel worship. Why would men want to worship something created by Jesus instead of worshiping Jesus? That's what **Romans 1** is all about. Paul said in **Romans 1** that man chose to worship the creature rather than the Creator!

Not only did He create all that there is...but **verse 16** tells us He created all things for Himself. What does this mean? It means He not only is the **source of all creation**...but all of it belongs to Him...He is **sovereign over all creation**.

This world belongs to Jesus! And He isn't sitting up in heaven wringing His hands wondering what in the world is He going to do about the mess we've made down here. I have to tell myself that over and over.

When I look at the events over in Afghanistan and Iraq...and when I look at the folks who want to get in the White House come the next election, I have to remember that **God is sovereign**.

God is in control.

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God holds the hearts of kings in His hands.

And God does what He will in the hosts of the heavens and among the inhabitants of the earth and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, "What hast Thou done?"

Nothing takes Him by surprise! Jesus is sovereign over creation. He made it and He made it for Himself...to serve His purposes...and when He gets good and ready He'll make all things right!

Not only is Jesus the **source** of creation and the **sovereign** over creation, He is also the **sustainer** of creation!

Verse 17 tells us that He holds all things together!

Warren Wiersbe tells the story of a group of tourists who were taken for a tour of an atomic laboratory and the guide explained how all matter is composed of rapidly moving electric particles.

The tourists studied models of molecules and were amazed to learn that matter is made up primarily of space. During the question and answer period one visitor asked, "If this is the way matter works, what holds it all together?" And the guide did not have answer to that question.

But you and I do, don't we? **"He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."**

Remember what we read from **Hebrews 1** awhile ago? **"Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power."**

And this is yet another affirmation of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Only **God** existed before all of Creation.
Only **God** can make Creation hold together.
To make Jesus less than God is to dethrone Him!

And this is exactly what the Gnostics had done! They had dethroned the Lord Jesus Christ. They had made Jesus to be just another of a long line of emanations from God! He was not the only way to God, He was just another rung on the ladder!

But, the Lord Jesus Christ is God!! "If Jesus Christ is not Lord of all, He cannot be Lord at all."

Well, not only is Jesus Christ preeminent in **character** and in **creation**, but

3) He is preeminent in the Church...verses 18-19...

And in **verse 18**, Paul presents four great truths. The first thing is that the Lord Jesus is the **head** of the body of Christ known as the church. The church is referred to with many metaphors in Scripture...**a family, a kingdom, a vineyard, a flock, a building, a bride...**

But, here Paul refers to the church as the body of Christ. And every body must have a head and the head of the church is not the Pope...not the bishops or the cardinals or the leaders of any denomination. The head of the church is Jesus!

And He is not a head detached from the body! Remember what

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Jesus said to Saul on the road to Damascus? "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

And this verse tells us that He is the **beginning** of the church. The church was born and begun in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is responsible for its origin.

This verse also tells us that He is the first born from the dead. Again, this means first in rank. Of all the people who were ever raised from the dead or ever will be, Jesus is the highest in rank. Besides this, those Jesus and the disciples raised from the dead would die again.

Lastly, this verse tells us that in **all things** Jesus has preeminence. He has first place in **everything! He is King of kings and He is Lord of lords!**

Verse 19 tells us that it pleased God for all the fullness to dwell in Jesus.

What does this mean? Dr. Kenneth Wuest says in his commentary on Colossians that this fullness was not something that was **added to His being...it was something that was part of His essential being.**

And it pleased the Father for this fullness to dwell in the Son. The **Gospel of John** says that he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

The next verses tell us that

4) He is preeminent in conversion...verses 21-22...

There was a time when you and I were enemies of God. Now, we may not have thought of ourselves that way. We may not have described ourselves that way.

But, we were and nobody could do anything about it. Neither our mother nor our father could reconcile us with God. There is only one way for sinful man to come into a relationship with holy God and that is through the blood of the Lord Jesus shed at Calvary.

We were at war with God...but Jesus had made it possible for peace to be made between us and God. This expression "made peace" literally means "joined together."

It's a picture of Jesus Christ putting the holy hand of the Father in one hand and the sinful hand of man in the other and joining the two hands together. And because of this, I'm at peace with God. I'm no longer the enemy of God. I'm the friend of God. I'm no longer separated from God.

While I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me and has provided peace with God for me!

Not only is there **peace provided** for me, but we see the **price that was paid**. I'm not saved because Jesus walked on the water...or healed the sick...or raised the dead. I could never have been at peace with God without a price being paid...and the price that was paid was the shed blood of the dear Lord Jesus Christ!

We also see that one day you and I will be presented before the Father

Holy, blameless and beyond reproach!

Now, how many of us this morning would say that we feel holy and blameless and beyond reproach?

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Well, I want to tell you on the authority of the precious Word of God that that is where we are **positionally** right now in God's sight and that will one day be where we are **practically** in His presence.

The word "holy" is closely related to the word **saint**. Both of these words express the idea of **"being set apart, being devoted to God."**

In the New Testament, saints aren't dead people **who went about doing good in their lifetime and working miracles and who never sinned...**

New Testament saints are living people **who have trusted Jesus Christ**. And Paul wrote this letter to folks who were living saints...holy people.

Paul also says we will be **blameless** when we are presented to God. This means **without spot or blemish**. Is your soul clean before God today?

The hymn writer wrote:

**"Dark is the stain that we cannot hide –
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide –
Whiter than snow you will be today.**

**Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that will
Pardon and cleanse within.**

**Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that
Is greater than all my sin."**

And another wrote:

**"Oh, precious is the flow that washes white as snow...
No other fount I know...nothing but the blood of Jesus!"**

Lastly, Paul says we will be presented to the Father **beyond reproach**. Do you know what that means? It **means no accusation that Satan or anyone else could hurl against us will stand!**

See, the most important thing is not how **other people** see us, nor even how **you and I** see ourselves! The most important thing is how **God** sees us! (The crowns we receive will be affected by what we did after our salvation.)

Remember Paul's purpose in writing this letter. He is refuting the teaching of the Gnostics that promised their followers a kind of perfection that nothing else could give. Paul wrote, **"You already have a perfect standing in Christ...so why seek for it anywhere else?"**

Well, let's quickly look at **verse 23** and we'll be through.

Verse 23...

This verse has been used by folks to say, "See, there is something we must do to earn our way to heaven. We must continue in the faith...we must not move away from the gospel... See, there is something we must do!"

That's not what this verse means. The **"if"** in **verse 23** is better translated "since."

See, Paul is not doubting that the Colossian believer were going to continue in the faith...he was assuming that they were.

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We need to be reminded again that if our salvation were left us to us, we would never be saved. Nobody just wakes up one morning and decides they are going to be saved. God is the author of salvation.

“He called me long before I heard, before my sinful heart was stirred...but when I took Him at His Word, forgiven He lifted me.”

You and I didn't take the initiative in our salvation. And God's Word tells us that there comes a time when He stops taking the initiative... "My Spirit will not always strive with man."

And, let me say also say this. If it were possible for a Christian to lose his salvation, then no Christian would stay saved. Staying saved is not up to me and it isn't up to you. We are **kept saved** by the same power that **saved** us in the first place.

We don't continue in the faith **in order to keep our salvation**. We continue in the faith **because we are saved!** John said in *1 John*, ***“They went out from us because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have remained with us.”***

Continuing in the faith is a sign of genuine salvation.
Having our faith firmly established and steadfast is a sign of genuine salvation.
Staying close to the hope of the gospel is a sign of genuine salvation.

Let me just say this again...Genuine salvation must come to each person individually...we don't inherit it from our parents...God doesn't have any grandchildren!

Folks who have truly been saved will do these things...and when you see someone who professed at one time to be a Christian, but has not continued in the faith, firmly established and steadfast and has moved away from the hope of the gospel that they have heard, then you can believe that person probably wasn't really saved in the first place.

Well, that is our lesson for today. I hope the truth that we will take home with us today is that in all things Jesus must have the preeminence.

This week let's test ourselves on this.

In our **family**, will Jesus have preeminence?
In our **work**, will Jesus have preeminence?
In our **conversation**, will Jesus have preeminence?
In our **attitudes**, will Jesus have preeminence?
In our **decisions**, will Jesus have preeminence?

He wants to have preeminence in every area of our lives. May we allow that to happen!