

## THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

Introductory Message

Colossians 1:15-18

**Intro:** Today I want to begin the exposition of Paul’s letter to the church at Colosse. I suppose that different pastors have different reasons for teaching different books of the Bible, if that is what they actually do. Sometimes a particular book is chosen because it fits the needs that a particular church may have at a particular time. It is apparent as we read through the epistles of Paul that they were all written to meet special needs of the churches to whom he wrote.

Let me review just a little information about this Colossian epistle even though many of you may already be familiar with its background.

Paul was imprisoned in Rome and during that time he wrote four of his epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Philemon lived in Colosse, and was a member of the Colossian church, so Colossians and Philemon are often studied together.

Colosse was a city in the Roman province of Asia, which is now Turkey. It was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus. It was a prosperous city five hundred years before Christ was born. Colosse, along with Laodicea and Hierapolis, formed a triangle. These cities are both mentioned in Col. 4:13. Colosse was not as important as Laodicea and Hierapolis, and yet it retained some of its prominence until late in the second century and early in the third century after Christ. Today there is no Colosse.

The Apostle Paul was used to establish many churches throughout the Roman Empire, but Colosse was not one of them. He had never visited Colosse when he wrote to them. Epaphras (1:7; 4:12) may have been the one who founded the church in Colosse, having heard Paul when he was in Ephesus. It is thought that Archippus (4:17) was the pastor of the church when Paul wrote, and that he was probably Philemon’s son (see Ph. 2).

I chose Colossians this time (although I have taught it before) because I was particularly impressed by it as I read through it in my Bible reading just recently. And there was one word that attracted my attention: the word “preeminence.” Of course I had noticed it before, but it seems that the Holy Spirit was calling my attention in a special way to that word.

The Apostle Paul was speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ when he wrote, “that in all things HE might have the preeminence.” This is the expression of the Father’s will concerning His Son. The Father has given His Son the preeminence.

I checked with my Bible program on my computer, and I learned that there are only three times that the English word “preeminence” is used in the Bible. There are two other words, one Hebrew, and the other Greek, which are translated “preeminence,” but Col. 1:18 is the only verse in which this specific word is used (πρωτεύω). In Ecc. 3:19 Solomon was saying that what happens to beasts also happens to men, that is, they both die, and then he said, “so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast.” In 3 John 9 the Apostle John was speaking of Diotrephes “who loveth to have the preeminence among them.” He wanted to be the church boss. The verb is actually the same verb that Paul used in Col. 1:8 with the Greek word for love attached to it (φιλο-πρωτεύω). Diotrephes, who probably wasn’t even a Christian although he was a church leader, wanted the place which God had given to His Son.

All of these words have to do with occupying a special place of prominence above others.

Our word “preeminence” is a combination of the prefix “pre-“ and the word eminence. Eminence is a term of honor. It is sometimes used of kings or queens. In countries which are under a monarchy, they may speak of “His eminence, the King,” or they may refer to a Queen, if she is the one who is the member of the royal family.

But the term “preeminence,” adding the prefix “pre” to “eminence,” means supreme honor, supreme authority. This is one who is eminent above all others. To use this word with reference to our Lord means that there is no one who is greater than He is. He stands uniquely above all others. He is worthy of the greatest honor. He is worthy of our worship. His authority is superior to all other authorities. This is the place that the God, the Father, has given to God, the Son.

It seems to me that Col. 1:8 could easily be considered the key verse of the epistle, and to emphasize that I am beginning our study with verses 15 through 18, and then I will go back to the beginning of the epistle next week. I want my message this morning to show how *the preeminence of Christ* is related to the whole epistle. Those of us who know the Lord

love the epistles of Paul, but Paul never wrote to give eminence to himself, and that is particularly true of this epistle. The glorious majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ stands out in a very special way in this epistle. Anyone who might be reading this epistle for the first time with any discernment at all, could not help but see that the highest place of all who have ever lived on this earth belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us look at His preeminence, His supreme glory, His magnificent power, His absolute authority, as Paul developed in this epistle.

You probably did not need to come here this morning to be told that:

## **I. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS PREEMINENT IN SALVATION (Col. 1:13-14).**

These two verses are not the only verses in this epistle that speak of the doctrine of salvation, but they are among the first, and will show our Lord's preeminence in this area.

God initiated our salvation, but it has been accomplished as verse 14 clearly tells us that it is in, lit., the Son of God's love, that we have "redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

To say that the Lord Jesus Christ is preeminent in salvation, is to say that He is the only Savior. The reason He had to come from heaven, be born of the virgin Mary, entering into our humanity although without sin, was because no other was qualified to bear our sins, redeem us from sin's penalty and power, and secure the forgiveness of our sins – all to the complete satisfaction of the Father.

Notice Col. 1:20-22. The preeminence of Christ in salvation is seen in the glorious truth that by His death He not only has saved us in the past, but He continues to save us in the present, and His work continues until it is completed when we will be "holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight."

Let's notice another area in which our Lord is preeminent.

## **II. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS PREEMINENT IN HIS REVELATION OF THE FATHER (Col. 1:15a; 2:9).**

From Genesis on down through Malachi, there is much to be learned about God. And all that we learn in those OT books is true, completely true, eternally true. But God's revelation of Himself was not completed until the Lord Jesus Christ came. He is "the image of the invisible God." No one on earth has ever seen the Father, but according to John 1:18, "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Neither Moses, nor David, nor Isaiah, nor John the Baptist, nor the Apostle John, nor the Apostle Paul, nor any of the Lord's people who has ever lived, male or female, could truthfully say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). But the Lord Jesus Christ could say it, and He did say it, because He came as the final and complete revelation of God. And since our Lord is preeminently the revelation of the Father, He is above every other revelation that God has given of Himself because in Him, at least for now, the glory of the Father is complete. We may learn more later, but Jesus Christ is preeminent as the revelation of God.

A third way in which we see the preeminence of Christ is mentioned in Col. 1:16-17:

### **III. THE PREEMINENCE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AS THE CREATOR AND SUSTAINER OF THE UNIVERSE (Col. 1:16-17).**

Paul's heart was full and overflowing toward the Lord as we go through even just the first chapter of this epistle. We will pick up many of the good details as we go through these four chapters verse by verse. But for now look at these two amazing, but very much neglected, verses in chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. (Read.)

In these days when the false and ridiculous theory of evolution seems to have won the day with most people (or so it seems), how refreshing it is to turn to the Word of God to read the truth.

Where did this marvelous universe come from in which we live? It was all made by Jesus Christ. The Apostle John wrote:

All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:3)

And if you read the first two verses of that chapter you will see that He was speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Twice Paul said in Col. 1:16 that everything in the universe, seen and

unseen, was made by our Lord! But it was not only made by Him, but “for Him.” It belongs to Him. It exists for His glory. Not many people know this, or even want to know it.

But this is not all. If the Lord made this universe, He had to live before He made it. Paul said “”He is before all things,” and “is” means that He always existed. He is the eternal Son of God. And “before” not only means *prior to* creation, but *supremely above* creation. God is obviously greater than anything that He has made.

And yet not even this is all: “and by Him all things consist.” This means that He is the One Who is holding this whole universe together. If He were to withdraw His control over this universe, cosmos would become chaos!

Much of which I have already pointed out is written in the first four verses of the book of Hebrews. Let me read those verses to you:

- 1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
- 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;
- 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;
- 4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Heb. 1:1-4).

The preeminence of Christ in all things is seen throughout the OT as well as the NT.

There is no person who has ever lived upon the earth about whom we can say the things that the Apostles have said about our Lord Jesus Christ. And for our encouragement let me say that it is God Who has made His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, preminent over all things, and He will see to it that the day will come when His preeminence will be recognized by all. I don't mean that everyone is going to be saved, but everyone will be made to recognize the preeminence of Christ.

I am not going to have the time to say all that I wanted to say about the preeminence of Christ, so I will finish next Sunday what I don't have time

to say today. But let me make one more point.

Today is Easter Sunday. It is the day which has been set aside historically to remember the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Actually every Sunday is resurrection day because that is why the early church met on the first day of the week. The Lord was raised from the dead on the first day of the week, and so that is the day we come together to worship the Lord and to hear the preaching of His Word.

But I don't hear that message when people talk about Easter today. To most people it is just another holiday. And so people are saying, "Happy Easter," or "Have a good Easter weekend." You and I hear a lot about Easter bunnies, and Easter eggs, but almost nothing about Christ and His resurrection. I am not speaking in defense of the name, Easter, but it does bother me that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not important any more to the masses of people, even many people who call themselves Christians. As I close this morning look with me at Col. 1:18. And here I want you to see:

#### **IV. THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH (Col. 1:18).**

This is the verse where we have the word "preeminence." And so this was a main point that Paul was making.

When he spoke here about "the church," he was not talking just about the church in Colosse. He was talking about the true children of God wherever they are, those who were born again, and who were trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation. You know, you can be a member of a local church, but not a member of the body of Christ. To be a member of the body of Christ means that you have trusted Christ as your Savior and have been baptized by the Spirit into this body of Christ.

Christ is the Head of this spiritual body of Christ. And to be a part of that body, you must believe in the resurrection of Christ. He was raised bodily from the dead. He was not the first one to be raised from the dead, but He was the first One to be raised from the dead Who would never die again. And He is called here in Col. 1:18, "the firstborn of the dead," because His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. We are going to have glorified bodies, and they will be bodies like our Lord had. But there would be no church, and there would be no resurrection to eternal life if the Lord

Jesus had not been raised from the dead. So we have a twofold preeminence of Christ here in verse 18 of chapter 1. He is preeminent as the Head of the church, and He is preeminent over death itself. He was “delivered for our offences,” our sins, “and was raised again for our justification,” raised as God’s testimony to us that He was perfectly satisfied with the work of His Son on the Cross, and that justification was secured for all of the people of God.

And, as verse 18 indicates, it was through His death and resurrection that “in all things He might have the preeminence.”

**Concl:** When I was a child, Easter Sunday was one time in the year when churches were filled. I don’t know that that was altogether a good thing, but it did give faithful pastors an opportunity to preach the Gospel to people that he would not see in church until maybe Christmas. But all of that is changed now. People don’t come in large numbers. They are too busy buying new Spring clothing, and giving their children bunny rabbits and jelly beans, so the true meaning of this day has been lost. We need to make sure that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and that we are telling our children about a Savior who came to die for sinners, that we might be forgiven of our sins, made new creatures in Christ, through His sacrifice on the Cross. And that Christians gather every Sunday to worship a living Christ Who has been appointed by God to have the preeminence “in all things.”