

WHO IS OUR REDEEMER?

Colossians 1:15-18

Intro: Many of us were raised in Christian homes, and have been accustomed to reading the Bible, or hearing it read, for as long as we can remember. But that is not the case with everyone. We have learned since we began the study of this letter to the church at Colosse, that Paul had never been to Colosse. He knew some of them because he had met them in other places, but he had never been to Colosse. Very few of the people who were in the church at Colosse had been raised in a Christian home. When Paul's letter arrived they could not have run off copies of his letter on a copy machine so that everyone would have his own copy. No, instead at a regular meeting of the church this epistle was read to all of the congregation. Have you ever tried to put yourself in their position as you have read through this letter? There are some words in it that they would not have heard before, at least not until they became Christians.

Yesterday I read through 1 Peter and noticed as everyone would in reading through that epistle, that Peter addressed it to the Jews of the Dispersion, meaning those who had been forced to leave Jerusalem and probably other parts of Israel. And he mentioned five areas: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, *Asia*, and Bithynia. This is the area where Colosse was. Peter probably wrote a little after Paul wrote, but the purpose of both of these apostles was to make sure that the believers in that whole area of Asia were really grounded in the truth of God, *and especially the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. The same was true of Peter's second epistle. Peter's last words in his second epistle were, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." And then Peter added, "To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18).*

So Peter gave special emphasis in his epistles to what he had to say about the Lord Jesus Christ. The spiritual growth of any Christian is to be measured by what he or she knows about the Lord Jesus Christ and personal fellowship with Him.

The same is true of what the Apostle Paul had to say about the Lord Jesus Christ in his letter to the Colossian believers. And I pointed out to you in my introductory message on this epistle that Paul's motivation in writing to the church at Colosse, was his concern that there were teachers who had come to Colosse who were not preaching Christ. Christ is given the place of preeminence in the Bible, and He is to have the preeminent place

in all of our lives. And when anyone or anything is brought in any church, or in the life of any Christian, this is an indication of major trouble ahead.

Last Sunday morning we considered verses 12, 13, and 14 in chapter 1. They have to do with the Gospel. They are the Gospel, although there is more to the Gospel than we have in those three verses. At the same time they are very comprehensive. Paul was telling us that we need to be continually giving God the Father thanks for the inheritance that is ahead for each one of us. And then he went on to say that we need to give God thanks for delivering us from Satan and translating us into “the kingdom of His dear Son,” or lit., *the Son of His love*. And then Paul went on to say that it is by this Son of the Father that we have been redeemed by His blood, *i.e.*, by His sacrifice on the Cross. But this redemption also includes “the forgiveness of sins.”

I doubt if any of this is new truth to any of us here today, but I hope that we have not allowed it to become anything ordinary to any of us. Reading over these verses ought to bring forth from our lips and from our hearts great thanksgiving. We don't deserve any of these blessings. They have come to us by the grace of God. And one wonderful thing about the blessings mentioned in verses 12, 13, and 14 is that we can never lose any of them. They are secured for us by God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ.

Now I have taken the work of our Lord in verse 14, by which we speak of Him as our Redeemer, or our Savior, and am raising the question, “Who Is Our Redeemer?” It seems to me that in verses 15 through 18 Paul was saying something like this: “Now let me tell you more about this One Who has redeemed us, this One Who has by His death obtained the forgiveness of our sins. Paul has already told us in verse 3 that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God's Son in a unique sense. But let us note how the Apostle Paul described our Redeemer.

I. “THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD” (Col. 1:15a).

What does this mean? We know that God has never been seen. The Apostle John declared this in John 1:18:

18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

The Greek verb translated “declared” is ἐξηγήσομαι, and it means that

Jesus Christ being the Son of God has revealed in His Person the very nature of God.

When the angel announced to the virgin Mary that she was to be with child even though she was not married, the angel said to her:

The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

In John 1:1 and 14 the Apostle John stated clearly that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, was actually Deity in human flesh. The Jews understood this because when the Lord said that God was His Father (see John 5:17), the Apostle John recorded the following words:

18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18).

Bishop Lightfoot (p. 211) says that “image” here in Col. 1:15 means three things:

- 1) Likeness – between the Father and the Son.
- 2) Representation by the Son of His Father.
- 3) Manifestation.

Earlier the Apostle Paul had used this same expression in describing the character of our Lord. Cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4:

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:
4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

See also Col. 1:19; 2:9. And then we have that classic passage on the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ in Heb. 1:1-3:

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.

This is the foundational truth about our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus became a Man for two reasons: 1) to complete the revelation of God which had continued from the beginning of time, and 2) that He might die for sinful men as their Substitute. No other person who has ever lived could qualify for such a work. The Lord Jesus could because He was without sin. So when Philip said to the Lord, "Lord show us the Father," the Lord responded with these words found in John 14:9:

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

In Rom. 9:4 and 5 when Paul was discussing the people of Israel, he had this to say about Israel and about our Lord:

4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;

5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen (Rom. 9:4-5).

So the One Who has qualified us for the inheritance of the saints, the One Who has delivered us from Satan and from sin, and translated us into the kingdom of God's Son, and the One Who has redeemed us and secured for us the forgiveness of our sins, is not other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, "Who is the image of the invisible God." Don't let anyone ever shake your confidence in that wonderful truth.

But our Redeemer has another grand title. He is:

II. THE CREATOR (Col. 1:15b-17).

He is called "the firstborn of every creature." Some say that this means that Jesus Christ was just a human being, but not God, and that He was the first one created by God. But they say that because they have not gone on to read verse 16: "For by Him were all things created . . ."

William Hendriksen has given us this explanation of the title, "the firstborn of every creature," linking what we have just seen is the meaning of the first part of verse 15, and connecting that statement with the second part of verse 15. Dr. Hendriksen said:

Now if the Son is the very image of the invisible God, and if this

invisible God is from everlasting to everlasting, it follows that the Son, too, must be *eternally* God's image. With respect to His Deity He cannot belong to the category of time and space. He cannot be a mere creature, but must be in a class by Himself, that is, raised high above every creature. Accordingly, the apostle continues, **the firstborn of every creature**, that is, *The One to whom belongs the right and dignity of the Firstborn in relation to every creature*. That the phrase "the firstborn of every creature" cannot mean that the Son Himself, too, is a creature, the first in a very long line, is clearly established by verse 16. He is prior to, distinct from, and highly exalted above every creature. As the firstborn He is the Heir and Ruler of all (p. 72).

And this is exactly what the Apostle Paul said at the end of verse 16: "All things were created by Him, and for Him." And this includes those creatures and that part of creation which we cannot see, as well as all that we can see. God created not only human beings, but angels (which we have not seen), and all of the authorities and powers on earth and in heaven. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Lord of all. No one among angels or men, regardless of the power and authority that they have, is greater than our Lord Jesus Christ – NONE!!! This is consistent with what the Apostle Paul taught in Romans 13 about governments and their leaders. They are ordained of God, and they are the ministers of God. Some day this truth will be evident to all when our Lord reigns and King of kings and Lord of lords. But He is the sovereign Ruler NOW!!! This is very, very comforting truth, isn't it?

But not only is our Lord Jesus Christ the Creator, *but He is the One Who holds it all together, and Who keeps it all going*. "He is before all things," meaning that He existed eternally before there was a creation, "and by Him all things consist." As I have said before, if the Lord were to withdraw His hand from the operation of this universe in which we live, *cosmos would become chaos!* But we can all be thankful that our Lord Jesus Christ is the One Who is holding all things together in creation, that which we can see, and that which we cannot see.

What a different place this world would be if all people had this knowledge. But they are spiritually blinded, and we were too until the Lord Jesus gave us life and the ability to know and love and believe the truth of His Word. The heavens do declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.

But our Redeemer is not only “the image of the invisible God,” and the Creator of the heaven and the earth, but the Apostle Paul would let us know that He is also:

III. THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH (Col. 1:18).

The Bible speaks of both “the church” and “churches.” The church which is His body, came into existence with the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Members of His body from that time to this have been meeting together in various locations around the world for the purpose of being instructed in the Word of God, in order to worship the Lord, to have fellowship with each other, and to spread the Gospel, the message of salvation, throughout the world, that the elect people of God may be saved. But sometimes people get into local churches who are not saved, who are not members of the body of Christ. And that is where much of the trouble in local churches comes from. But the Lord knows those who are His. And He said while He was still here on earth that He would build His church. And He has been doing just that from Pentecost on. The Lord is not going to let His work die. He is “the Head of the Body, the church.”

Lightfoot identifies our Lord as the Head of the Church as the One Who inspires, rules, guides, unites, sustaining the Church by His power, directing her ministry and fellowship, and Who is the life of the Church. He is the Church’s beginning, and His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all who are in the Church. Every true believer is a member of the Body of Christ. Husbands are told in Ephesians to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it.

Concl: Now concluding this section of our text with reference to our salvation, to Christ as the final and complete revelation of God, to Him as our Creator, and as the Head of the Church, we are told that God has ordered all of areas for one reason: “that in all things He might have the preeminence.” Prophets and apostles have been used by God to give us light upon light concerning the revealing of God. But our Lord came to reveal the Father, not just in what He taught about Him, but in His very Person. In Him is the fulness of God. The same is true in creation. What blasphemy it is to attribute the origin of this universe in which we live to any other than to the living God and our Lord Jesus Christ. And how far we have often strayed from recognizing that Christ alone is the Head of His church, and we need to be looking to Him, and constantly feeding

upon His Word, to get our guidance in living for Him and serving Him. How easily we lose sight of this purpose that God has for His Son, “that in all things He might have the preeminence,” that He might always be first!

Back in the nineteenth century there were many godly men serving in the Church of England. Bishop Handley Moule was one of them; Charles Simeon was another. Simeon was the pastor of the church which was on the campus of Cambridge University.

Bishop Moule tells in his commentary on Colossians about a friend who was listening to Charles Simeon preach on this text, “that in all things he might have the preeminence.” And Simeon who was an old man at the time, around the year 1835 said concerning this text, “And He must have it, and He will have it, and He shall have it.” Bishop Moule’s friend said that the effect on the congregation was “strong and thrilling” as the aged pastor lifted himself as high as he could behind his pulpit “to bear witness to the Redeemer’s glory.”

I have in my library a set of twenty-one volumes of Charles Simeon’s sermons. And in it is his sermon on “The Glory of Christ” from this text in Col. 1:18. And he closed his message with these words:

Are you not ashamed that this adorable Savior has held so low a place in your esteem, that even the most contemptible things that can be imagined have had a preeminence above Him? There is not a base lust which has not more power to sway you, than love to Him, or zeal for His glory. There is not a vanity which you have not more desired, nor an object whom you have not more feared, nor a device you have not more relied upon, than He. Would you not have thought it impossible, that a Being so glorious in Himself, and so gracious unto you, should ever be so despised by you, as He has been? O! humble yourselves before Him; and now set yourselves with all diligence to honor and to glorify His Name. Let it no longer be a doubt, either in your own minds or in the minds of any that behold you, who has the preeminence in your souls. Give yourselves wholly to Him: let your daily and hourly inquiry be, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” In short, endeavor to begin the life of heaven whilst you are yet upon earth. When once you are there, “you will follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Rev. 14:4). Follow Him now; follow the footsteps which He trod on earth: follow Him, in your

affections, to the highest heavens (Col. 3:1-2): and look forward to the time when He, Who has ascended as your Forerunner, shall come again to take you to Himself and “seat you with Him upon His throne, as He sitteth on his Father’s throne” (Vol. 18, pp. 161, 162).

God has given His Son the preeminence in revealing Himself to us. He has given Him the preeminence as the Creator and Sustainer of this universe in which we live. He has the preeminence in the Church as its Head. And the Lord Jesus has the preeminence in our salvation. No one can be saved except through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. By God’s grace let’s be sure that He has the preeminence in our lives. Let us live each day to glorify our gracious and loving God, and the One Whom Charles Simeon called our “adorable Savior.”