Col 1.15—Christ, the Image of God

Introduction to Gnosticism

- I. The Colossian church was troubled by false teachers who held an early form of the heresy of Gnosticism. This heresy is the backdrop to all that Paul says in this letter.
 - A. The Gnostics believed that God was to be reached and salvation was to be attained through a "higher knowledge" that the ordinary believer was incapable of attaining.
 - B. Gnosticism was a blending of Christian ideas with notions from either: Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy, or Eastern mysticism. This turned the gospel of redemption through Jesus Christ into a philosophy that offered salvation through self-knowledge.
- II. The Gnostics held to a cosmological dualism in which matter was evil and spirit was good.
 - A. This necessarily divided God and matter, making it impossible for God to have anything to do with creation. To bridge the gap, God projected Himself, resulting in spirits/angels, one after the other, emanating from Him. Eventually, one of these divinities turned evil and created this material/evil world, trapping divine sparks in human flesh.
 - B. Christ was one of these *emanations* and He came to earth to tell us of our natural divinity and how to live spiritually above this material/evil world.
 - C. According to this teaching, the salvation Christ brings is really self-knowledge of one's own divinity—a deliverance from ignorance. The good news He preaches is really a philosophy.
- III. In Gnosticism, Jesus is neither eternal nor equal to the Father nor incarnate—all of which the gospel claimed He was. Paul hits these lies head-on in this letter, beginning with vv.15-20 (cf. 1Tim 6.20; Col 2.8).

The invisibility of God the Father

- I. The invisibility of God the Father can be thought of in 2 ways
 - A. God the Father is invisible because God is spirit (Jn 4.24; 1Tim 1.16; Jn 1.18). It's impossible to behold the divine essence with our eyes because God has neither a body nor body parts (Dt 4.10-18).
 - B. God the Father is invisible because God is incomprehensible. We cannot possibly comprehend His

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immense, infinite, and eternal nature, Isa 40.12-26; Ex 33.20; Jdg 13.18; Rom 11.33-36.

The gracious visibility of God the Father in Christ

- I. The word "image" expresses three ideas about Christ's person, namely, likeness, representation, and manifestation:
 - A. Christ bears a perfect and exact *likeness* to the Father as His only- and eternally-begotten Son. Jesus is the exact imprint of the Father's nature, Heb 1.3.
 - B. Christ accurately *represents* God to us. The Father and the Son are distinct persons, but not distinct essences. Rather, they are of the same divine and eternal essence, Heb 1.3; Jn 10.30; WSC 6.
 - C. Christ perfectly *manifests* the Father to us, Jn 14.9; Jn 1.18.
- II. Thus, the Jesus of the gospel is the perfect and essential image of God the Father. He possesses all the attributes of His divine nature and has come near to us in the incarnation in a nature that can be grasped by our senses, 1Jn 1.1-2; 2Cor 4.4.
 - A. He not only holds forth the Father's exact character to us, but He represents the whole of God to us, proposing Himself as the only object of our faith and love and promising us, in Him, not only reconciliation with the Father but an eternal life with the Triune God in Heaven.
- III. Thus, in contrast to Gnosticism, Christ is not an emanation of God, but is God Himself, co-essential and co-eternal with the Father. Nor is Christ equal to the angels, but He is God of the angels and the sole object of their worship (Isa 6.3; Heb 1.6).

The practical importance of this truth

- I. This deals a death blow to all the cults parading as "Christian" today. These are damning religions that deny Christ to be coessential and co-eternal with the Father. Don't be deceived by their lies and smooth talk, 1Jn 2.21-25; 4.1-6.
- II. This truth meets one of our deepest longings, namely, to have in God some palpable object to which our human affections can cling, Gen 32.29; Ex 33.18; Jdg 13.18. We can worship Christ, the image of God, as God, and yet not be idolaters. Let's therefore quiet our idolatrous tendencies with the hope of Heaven, when we will see God in human flesh.
- III. This points to the efficacy of Christ's atoning work. What He did, He did as God, our Emmanuel, thus working our redemption as only God can, namely, fully and finally, Jn 19.30. Hallelujah!