

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians
(7) The Preeminence of Jesus Christ in our Redemption (Col. 1:18-20)

Before us is a full, beautiful, setting forth of the glory of Jesus Christ. We have already pointed out that these verses convey two major themes. We see the *pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in creation* in verses 15-17. In verses 18-20 we read of the *pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in redemption* (vs. 18-20). In the first division, which we completed last week, five different traits of the Lord Jesus were set forth before us. Today we will address the second theme in which more traits of our Lord Jesus is set forth as He is shown to be pre-eminent in our redemption.

II. *The pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in redemption* (vs. 18-20).

¹⁸And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

It is important that we retain our understanding of the apostle's original intention for writing this epistle. Paul was confronting and correcting errant teaching that was adversely affecting the church. These verses before us serves this purpose.

The false teachers not only wrongly represented the relation of the angel powers to the universe, but they assigned them a false position in the work of redemption and a false relation to the Church. Hence Paul passes from the pre-eminence of the Son in the universe to speak of Him as Head of the Body. He is thus supreme alike in the universe and in the Church.¹

Under this heading, the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in redemption, we read that...

6. *Jesus Christ is the Head of the body, the church.* (1:18a)

Christ is the head, that is, the Leader or Lord of the church. The Father entrusted Jesus Christ with this responsibility. He had commissioned His Son to lead and guide His people in all their ways. He is suited in every way to be the head of the church. Again, this had immediate relevance for Paul's purpose to correct, protect, and preserve the church at Colossae.

Now if the Son of God is the Organic and Ruling Head of the church, the church is in no sense whatever dependent on any creature, angel or otherwise. This is the clear implication over against the teachers of error. Does not the church receive both its growth and guidance from its living Lord? Is it not energized by His power and governed by His Word and Spirit? Hence, is it not true that in Christ it has all it needs, and also that without Him it can accomplish nothing?²

Let us ask,

¹ A. S. Peake, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, in vol. 3 of *The Greek Expositor's Greek Testament* (Eerdmans, 1951), p. 507.

² William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, *New Testament Commentary* (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 77.

a. In what ways is Jesus Christ the “Head” of His Church?

(1) **Christ is the *federal* head of the church.** What does this mean? Jesus Christ is head in that He lived and died on behalf of His people and that His people were in Him during the days of His sojourn on earth.

God is pleased to deal with the human race corporately with one person as our representative, our federal head. Adam was the federal head of the entire human race. He stood as the representative of the human race before God, and not as a representative only, but as a substitutionary head for the entire human race. God dealt with the human race in accordance with how Adam its head lived before Him on our behalf. As Adam went, so did all of his posterity. When Adam sinned, the entire human race sinned in him. Adam died due to sin and because all were in Adam when he sinned, all died in him. Death came upon all humanity because all humanity sinned collectively when Adam our representative, our federal head, incurred the penalty for sin.

In the same way Jesus Christ is the federal head to the church. What happened to Christ, happened to all the people over which He is head. When Christ died, believers died with Him. When Christ arose, all believers rose with Him. When Christ ascended and was enthroned in heaven, all believers ascended with Him and were seated with Him in heavenly places (cf. Eph. 2:6). Because Jesus Christ is the federal head to the church, our place with Him in eternity is secure. All blessing from God flows to us due to Him.

(2) **Christ is the *organic* head of the church.** He is a head to the church like our heads are to our bodies. From Him we derive our life. We are members of His body--His arms legs, His eyes and His ears, functioning together as He works through us. This does not mean, of course, that the church has become Christ Himself; that is mystical nonsense. But the metaphor does reveal that our life and our functioning together are derived from our head. Another metaphor that conveys the similar idea is the Lord as the vine and we are the branches (cf. John 15). It means that one life exists in His people, even His life. We have a common life and that life is derived from Him.

(3) **Christ is the *ruling* head of the church.** Clearly Paul had this idea also in mind in this context. The Lord Jesus is head of the church in that He is her leader and ruler. Christ governs His church as a gracious and omnipotent King over His people. As the ruling head of the church, He protects the church and He provides for the church. He assures security for the church, enriching it with gifts and honor. He is their King over “Zion”, an emblem for the people of God, even the church of God. God’s eternal decree has established Him as the ruling head of the church, the role that He has occupied since His resurrection.

It is Christ that alone has authority to govern the Church, that it is he to whom alone believers ought to have an eye, and on whom alone the unity of the body depends.³ (Calvin)

(4) **Christ is the *loving* Head of the church.** This is in the sense that He is the husband to His bride. This idea is in accordance with Paul’s statement in Ephesians 5:23f, which reads, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also *Christ is head of the church*; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” This submission of the wife to the husband is not the acquiescence of a browbeat woman to her master. That is certainly not the kind of submission the church renders to her husband, Jesus Christ. No, it is a willingness to entrust herself

³ Calvin also wrote: “Papists, with the view of supporting the tyranny of their idol, allege that the Church would be (*ἀκέφαλον*) *without a head*, if the Pope did not, as a head, exercise rule in it. Paul, however, does not allow this honor even to angels, and yet he does not maim the Church, by depriving her of her head; for as Christ claims for himself this title, so he truly exercises the office. I am also well aware of the cavil by which they attempt to escape — that the Pope is a ministerial head. The name, however, of *head* is too august to be rightfully transferred to any mortal man, under any pretext, especially without the command of Christ. (Pope) Gregory shews greater modesty, who says (in his 92nd Epistle, 4th Book) that Peter was indeed one of the chief members of the Church, but that he and the other Apostles were members under one head.”

to her husband whom she knows has her interests upon his heart, that he will purpose to lead her rightly to the best possible end. He will sacrifice his own desires in order to fulfil hers. And so, “*Jesus Christ is the Head of the body, the church.*”

b. What constitutes His Church?

Before we move on in our passage, it may seem to be a needless question for us to pose, but actually it is a great need and of great importance for us to answer the question, “What did Paul mean by the church?” Most evangelicals in the last century would immediately respond, the church is the total number of Christians, who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ from the Day of Pentecost until the future rapture of the church. This is the common understanding of evangelicals that was shaped and promoted by dispensationalists of the 20th century. They regarded Pentecost as the day in which the church of Jesus Christ was born and the Lord has been building His church since then.⁴ They regard the believers who lived and died before Pentecost as not members of the church, but citizens of true Israel. They believe that God has two peoples in history, Israel and the church. Dispensationalists teach that these two distinct groups of people have different sets of promises given to them by God. They have different destinies. They will remain distinct through eternity, Israel and the church.

Here is a typical statement of the belief of what constitutes the church according to dispensationalists:

The Church, composed of the whole number of regenerate persons *from Pentecost to the first resurrection* (1 Cor. 15:52), united together to Christ by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13), is the body of Christ of which He is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23). As such the Church is a holy temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22); is “one flesh” with Christ (Eph. 5:30-31); is espoused to Him as a chaste virgin to one husband (2 Cor. 11:2-4); and will be translated to heaven at the return of the Lord to the air (1 Thess. 4:13-17).⁵

But actually this identity of the church as New Testament Christians is a fairly new understanding of what constitutes the church of Jesus Christ. For although it is granted that in a sense the church “began” at Pentecost, it was then constituted as a single body of believers, nevertheless the church has always been understood to comprise all people in history who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. The church of Jesus Christ is the total of God’s elect of all of history whom God has constituted as the body of Christ.

Writing upon Colossians 1:18, **John Gill**, an 18th century Baptist pastor, wrote this description of “the church” as all people in history who experience salvation:

By “the church” is meant, not any particular congregated church, as the church at Colossae, or Corinth, or any other; but *the whole election of grace*, the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven in the Lamb’s book of life; the church which Christ has given himself for, and has purchased with his blood, and builds on himself the rock, and will, at last, present to himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; this is compared to an human body, and therefore called “the body”; which is but one, consisting of many members in union with each other, set in their proper places in just symmetry and proportion to each other, and subservient to one another, and are neither more nor fewer; (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-14), etc. and of this body, the church, Christ is “the head”; he was the representative head of *this body of elect men from all eternity*, and in time; he is a political head of them, or in such sense an head unto them, as a king is to his subjects; he reigns in them by his Spirit and grace, and rules them by wholesome laws of his own enacting, and which he inscribes on their hearts, and he protects and defends them by his power; he is an economical head, or in such sense an head of them, as the husband is the head of the wife, and parents and masters are the heads of

⁴ Promoters of this view are a who’s who of evangelicalism, including C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles Ryrie, J. Vernon McGee, Charles Stanley, Chuck Swindoll, John MacArthur, David Jeremiah, Adrian Rogers, and many others.

⁵ Scofield, C. I., *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 1324.

their families, he standing in all these relations to them; and he is to them what a natural head is to an human body; of all which the Messiah is called one head, in Hosea 1:11.

This was the common understanding of the identity of “the church” until the rise of dispensationalism of the 20th century.

In further explanation of the teaching of dispensationalists on the church, here are seven distinctive doctrines believed and taught by them:

1. God has two distinct programs in history, one for Israel and one for the church.
2. The church does not fulfil or take over any of Israel’s promises or purposes.
3. The church age is a “mystery,” and thus no Old Testament prophecies foresaw it.
4. The present church age is a “parenthesis” or “intercalation” during which God has temporarily suspended His primary purpose with Israel.
5. The church age began at Pentecost and will end at the pretribulation rapture of the church before Christ’s second coming.
6. The church, or the body of Christ, consists only of those believers saved between Pentecost and the rapture.
7. The church as the body of Christ, therefore, does not include Old Testament believers.⁶

All of these are false doctrines; nevertheless, they are doctrines believed and taught by most evangelical teachers and churches throughout the world.

Historically, Protestants have taught differently regarding the identity and constitution of the universal church. Our old reformed confessions defined the church as the all of the redeemed of history. For example, the **Westminster Confession of Faith** (1646) defines the church in this way:

The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all. (Art. 25, par. 1).

Our own **Baptist Confession of 1689** defines the church with these similar words, having been built upon the above Westminster confession:

The universal Church, which may be called invisible (in respect of the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) consists of the entire number of the elect, all those who have been, who are, or who shall be gathered into one under Christ, Who is the Head. This universal Church is the wife, the body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all. (Art. 26, par. 1)

The doctrine of the church as only New Testament believers in distinction of the redeemed of Israel is besought with many difficulties and contradictions. Books have been written to chronicle these differences and difficulties, but the doctrines of dispensationalism persist in the churches. For our purposes, let us look at one passage of Scripture, **Ephesians 2:11-19**.

¹¹Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—¹²that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and that He

⁶ Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism; Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Puritan and Reformed, 1995), pp. 17f.

might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Paul is describing the universal church with particular attention given to the place and part that Gentile Christians have within the church. In these verses Paul identifies five things which were true of Gentiles *before* they had become Christians. These include:

- (1) Unconverted Gentiles were separate from Christ.
- (2) Unconverted Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.
- (3) Unconverted Gentiles were strangers to the covenants of promise.
- (4) Unconverted Gentiles were without hope.
- (5) Unconverted Gentiles were without God in the world.

But then Paul declared that these things were no longer true of converted Gentiles, those who had become Christians. After they had become Christians, it may be said that these...

- (1) Christian Gentiles are in Christ.
- (2) Christian Gentiles are included in the commonwealth of Israel.
- (3) Christian Gentiles are heirs of the covenants of promise.
- (4) Christian Gentiles have hope.
- (5) Christian Gentiles are with God in the world.

Paul was declaring that these believing Gentiles are now citizens of spiritual Israel, the Israel of God, fellow citizens with the Jewish believers in Jesus Christ. Dispensationalists would say that numbers 1, 4, and 5 in this second list are true of Gentile Christians, but not numbers 2 and 3.⁷ They do not believe that Gentile Christians are included in “the commonwealth of Israel” nor do they believe that Gentile Christians are “heirs of the covenants of promise” that God had given to Israel as recorded in the Old Testament.

Now it is true that on the Day of Pentecost the church became a spiritual reality. But that is not to say that the church was comprised of believers only upon and after Pentecost. That is the false deduction of dispensationalists. Paul was teaching that on Pentecost, due to the work of Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Lord had taken all of the saints of the past and joined with them all believers in this age, whether Jewish or Gentile, combining all believers of all ages into one body, His church.

In Hebrews 12 we also see the one church of Jesus Christ encompassing all believers in history. The writer was addressing Jewish Christians, who were spiritual pilgrims journeying to Mount Zion where they would all gather together as the people of God. In Hebrews 11 the writer had set forth many “witnesses” of this pilgrimage who had travelled before them, even the Old Testament saints. The writer declared in Hebrews 12 that New Testament believers had joined them, falling into line as a large steady stream of pilgrims journeying by faith through history unto their final destination. It is here that we see the one people of God set forth. **Hebrews 12:18-24** read:

¹⁸For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. ²⁰(For they could not endure

⁷ Ibid, pp. 33f. I am indebted to Mathison’s book cited above for these two lists.

what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.”²¹ And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”)

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,²³ *to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven*, to God the Judge of all, *to the spirits of just men made perfect*,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.⁸

But there is another real problem with the dispensational doctrine that the Bible sets forth two separate peoples of God, Israel and the church, with different purposes and destinies. I have never heard a satisfactory answer of a dispensationalist to this question: If there are two, and only two separate peoples in God’s program, Israel and the church, to which entity do the saints before Abraham belong? Noah lived before the formation of Israel, as did Enoch, Seth, Adam and Eve. If they were redeemed, and they certainly were, which group are they a part, Israel or the church? What promises belong to them? Of course the biblical answer is that all people who have ever been saved and whoever will be saved, will be so due to the life and death of Jesus Christ. There is one people of God of all the redeemed, one universal church, over which Jesus Christ is head. The two peoples understanding of the dispensationalists have no place for the believers prior to Abraham.

c. What is implied by the church as being “His body”?

The universal church, as well as its expression in a biblical local church, is the body of Christ in that it is the way in which Jesus Christ reveals Himself and accomplishes Himself in the world. As we employ our physical bodies to live out our lives each day accomplishing our desires and designs, so the Lord Jesus uses His “body”, the church, to accomplish His work in the world. The church as the body of Christ also speaks of the various gifted persons within the body who function together to accomplish the will of God through Jesus Christ.

The church as the body of Christ speaks of the common life that we have together, and that Jesus Christ is the source and head of the body. We derive our life from Him, who infuses His body with life. The church as His body also speaks of the interdependence we have with one another as His people, joined together by Him to live together for Him and to Him in this world.

The church of Jesus Christ as His body also instructs us on how we should view ourselves. We are not merely individuals each coming to experience individual salvation. We are a part of a whole, saved to be integrated and cooperative with His people in His body as we serve our Lord in His world.

After the apostle declared that Jesus Christ is the Head of the body, the church, he shows that...

7. Jesus Christ has precedence over all things.

We read in verse 18b, *“He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.”* All things began with the eternally begotten Son of God when He created all things. He is the Creator. Moreover, He was the first human being to be raised from the dead--He was the firstborn of the dead. This also speaks of His pre-eminence. He is the first of a vast multitude who will one day come forth from the dead. As one has said rightly:

⁸ John MacArthur teaches the dispensational doctrine of the two people of God, Israel and the church. In order to conform this passage to his teaching, he makes rather strange comments in his study Bible on these words and phrases in Hebrews 12:23: “**church of the firstborn.** The firstborn is Jesus Christ. The ‘church’ is comprised of believers who are fellow heirs with Christ, the pre-eminent One among the brethren (Rom. 8:17, 29). **Just men made perfect.** These are the OT saints in distinction from the ‘church of the firstborn,’ who are NT believers” [MacArthur Study Bible (Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 1921]. Clearly, the writer was not showing forth two different peoples, but one people of God of all history gathering to their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

It is the *risen* Christ who is head of His body the church; He receives the titles “the beginning” and “the firstborn” in resurrection as well as in creation. His resurrection marked His triumph over all the forces which held men in bondage. That first Easter morning saw the dawn of a new hope for mankind. Now Christ is the firstborn among many brethren; He is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep; His resurrection is the harbinger of the great resurrection-harvest of His people. But the resurrection day is anticipated here and now by those who know Him as the resurrection and the life and enjoy eternal life through their participation in Him. By His primacy in creation and resurrection alike the divine purpose is fulfilled, that is, in all things--new creation as well as old--He might be preeminent.⁹

8. Jesus Christ is God incarnate.

Verse 19 reads, “*For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*” It was to the end that the Father would have Jesus Christ have precedence over all things that it pleased the Father that in Jesus all the Fullness of the Godhead would dwell. Now God is Spirit, and there is no place in His universe where God is not fully present and manifest. God is also in His fullness in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Blessed Holy Trinity, who took upon Himself our human nature, thereby God becoming fully man. In Jesus Christ we have the transcendent God coming among us as the immanent God. Jesus Christ is Immanuel, God with us.

This delight of the Father in the Son was evident even during the old dispensation, yes, even before the world was founded (Psa. 2:7, 8; John 17:5; Eph. 1:9). During the period of Christ’s sojourn on earth it manifested itself again and again (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; John 12:28). It was indeed God’s good pleasure that in His Son *all* the fullness should dwell. The powers and attributes of deity were not to be distributed among a multitude of angels. The divine supremacy or sovereignty, either as a whole or in part, was not to be surrendered to them. On the contrary, in accordance with God’s good pleasure, from all eternity the plenitude of the Godhead, the fullness of God’s essence and glory, which fullness is the source of grace and glory for believers, resides in the Son of His love, in Him alone, not in Him and the angels. It dwells in Him whom we now serve as our exalted Mediator, and it manifests itself both in Creation and Redemption.¹⁰

a. That Jesus Christ is God is amply testified in the Scriptures.

(1) From direct statements of the Holy Scriptures

John 1:1. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. Clearly this teaches us that Jesus is God.

Hebrews 1:8. “But to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your Kingdom.””

John 20:28. “And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”” If this were not true, Jesus would have immediately rebuked Him.

Acts 20:28. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood.” Here God is referring to Jesus Christ.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 205f.

¹⁰ William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 79.

1 John 3:16. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” God laid down His life for us. It was not God the Father that laid down His life for us, but Jesus Christ, here identified as “God.”

1 John 5:20. “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

1 Timothy 3:16. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.”

(2) There are biblical descriptions of Jesus that can only lead to the conclusion that Jesus is God.

First, there are attributes of Jesus that are only true of God, for they are the incommunicable attributes that only God can possess. When we consider the attributes of God, they are commonly divided into two groups, those attributes that are communicable and others that are incommunicable. These attributes that are communicable, are those of which we can also be like, in a finite but real manner. But incommunicable attributes can only be true of God. In the Scriptures, Jesus is shown to have incommunicable attributes, therefore Jesus is God.

(1) Jesus is described as *eternal*, which is only true of God. Revelation 1:17, “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; ***I am the First and the Last.***” (2) Jesus is *infinite* as only God can be infinite. In Matthew 28:20 the Lord Jesus was teaching His disciples to observe all things that He had taught them, saying, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Only God can be with His people everywhere, for only God is infinite. (3) Jesus is *omniscient* as only God can be. Matthew 9:4, “But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” (4) Jesus is *omnipotent* as only God can be all-powerful. John 3:31, “He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.” In Philippians 3:21 it is said of Jesus that He “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” And Revelation 1:18 declares, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” Only an omnipotent God has the keys of Hades and Death, and we see here the Lord Jesus has those keys. Jesus Christ is eternal God.

Secondly, that there are relations that Jesus has with God the Father that can only lead to the conclusion that Jesus Himself is eternal God. Let me cite several of these. (1) Jesus is *the only begotten Son* of the Father. John 1:18 reads, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (2) Jesus is *the very image* of God the Father. Of unbelievers it is said in 2 Corinthians 4:4, “whose minds the god of this age has blinded (a reference to satan blinding them), who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of ***Christ, who is the image of God,*** should shine on them.” And in our passage under study, **Colossians 1:15**, we read of Christ, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” And again, here “firstborn” does not mean that Jesus was the first one created, because Jesus is not a created being; He is the Creator. “Firstborn” in this context speaks of His priority or pre-eminence within the family of God, as say a first born son would have been in that role in the ancient world. And then there is Hebrews 1:8, which tells us of Jesus: “who is the brightness of His glory and is the express image of His person, and is upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). And therefore because of these relations that Jesus has with God, one can only conclude that Jesus Himself is God; Jesus is divine.

Thirdly, there are acts that Jesus did that can only be done by God, proving Him to be eternal God incarnate. There are a number of these. (1) He refers to Himself as the author of the believer’s election. He

told His disciples in John 13:8, "I do not speak concerning all of you. ***I know whom I have chosen***; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.'" Commonly the Scriptures attribute the believers' election to God the Father, but here the Lord Jesus speaks of His having elected His own. Again, one must conclude that Jesus is God. (2) Jesus is shown to have ***known*** the inner secrets of men's unexpressed thoughts. Matthew 9:4 reads, "But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'" Only God has the ability to be a discerner of men's thoughts. You don't. I don't. Jesus could. Jesus can. Jesus is God. (3) Jesus hears ***the prayers*** of His people. John 14:14, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." Only God can hear and answer prayer. (4) Jesus will be ***the judge*** of all human beings. John 5:22 reads, "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." Only God could judge the entire human race; Jesus is God. (5) Jesus ***creates*** as only God can create. John 1:3 records, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (6) Jesus ***commands*** as only God could command. Matthew 8:26 states, "But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." That is evidence of His deity. (7) Jesus ***forgives sins*** as only God can forgive sins. Matthew 9:6 reads, "'But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins'-- then He said to the paralytic, 'Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.'" Jesus forgives sins. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus is God. (8) Jesus ***sanctifies*** His people as only God can sanctify, as we read in John 1. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." How could Jesus sanctify His people unless He is God? (9) Jesus Christ ***glorifies*** His people as only God can glorify. We read in John 10:28, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." How can Jesus glorify someone unless He is God Himself? And so these acts that Jesus did could only be done by God. Proving that Jesus is God.

Fourthly, it can be shown that Jesus Christ is God by the manner in which His disciples regarded Him and related to Him. This is certainly the case throughout the Gospel accounts. His disciples regarded Jesus and treated Him as only God would be treated, showing that they believed Jesus to be God. (1) Jesus is ***believed*** on as God would be believed on. John 3:18, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." And so, we believe on Jesus as we believe on God, for Jesus is God. (2) Jesus is ***loved*** as only they would love God. 1 Corinthians 16:22, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!" Here, we see again, if anyone does not love the Lord Jesus, let him be damned. And so, we see that disciples loved Jesus as they would only love God, because Jesus is God. (3) Jesus would be ***obeyed*** as God alone would be obeyed. John 17:5, "While He was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" That command of the Father to hear His Son means, "Listen to Him teach you and listen to him command you and do what He says." And so Christians obey Jesus Christ as they would obey God for He is eternal God. (4) Jesus is ***prayed*** to as though He were God. Acts 7:59 reads, "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'" Now normally we read in the Scriptures that prayer is offered to God the Father, through the merit of Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. But it is perfectly proper to pray to the Spirit or to pray to Jesus directly, as we see here in Acts 7:59. But the normal order that we should practice is that prayer is offered to the Father through the Lord Jesus. (5) Jesus Christ is ***praised*** as God is praised. Revelation 5:13 records, "And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!'" Here we see blessing, honor, and glory being ascribed to the Father, but in addition to God the Father, to the Lamb of God as well, which is clearly Jesus Christ, because Jesus is God as the Father is God. (6) Jesus is ***adored*** by His people as God is adored. Hebrews 1:6 declares, "But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'" Angels worship Jesus; only God should be worshipped. Angels worship Jesus to how that He is. And then we read in Philippians 2:10, "At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth and they will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father." And so, they do obeisance to Him.

They humble themselves and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. They glorify Him. They praise Him with a praise that only God deserves and only God should receive, but Jesus receives it, because He is God.

Why must the eternally begotten Son of the Father become man? I think that this is an important question for us to answer. *It was necessary for our salvation.* There are several reasons for this. *First*, only God can save souls from damnation and only God could satisfy for the guilt and debt that is owed to God for our sin, and therefore God must become man. **Psalm 49:7** and **15** record the words of the psalmist, “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him. ¹⁵But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me.” You see that only God can atone for man’s sin. *Second*, why was it necessary for God to become man? Because the sacrifice for sin that is made must be of infinite value or merit. God’s wrath upon sin is infinite, it would take a sacrifice of infinite worth to make a just atonement and that is why God Himself became a man to offer an atonement for our sin. *Third*, Jesus Christ must be God for a finite human being could not have born the burden of wrath that would be heaped upon a sacrifice for sin. I have taken this from **Isaac Ambrose** wrote, “Christ must therefore must needs be God, that He might abide the burden, and sustain the manhood by His divine power.” Only the Lord Jesus being eternal God could endure what He endured through all of the guilt and weight, and guilt of sin and punishment of sin heaped upon Him. *Fourth*, He must be God for the enemies of our souls were too powerful for us. It would take God Himself to overcome the devil and defeat him so as to secure our souls for heaven. It would take God to overcome sin, death, and hell, and damnation in order to deliver us from our condemned state and establish us blameless before the throne of God. And therefore it was most necessary that the eternally begotten Son of the Father become man in order to redeem us from our sin.

We next read in Colossians 1 that

9. Jesus Christ is the Reconciler of fallen creation.

“And through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross” (v. 20). When Adam sinned in the Garden, all of creation “fell.” Nothing was willingly submitted to God even though God continued to manifest His Sovereign Rule through history. But through Jesus Christ, God is returning His creation into willing subjection to God. Jesus Christ is reconciling all things unto His Father’s will. This will be realized at the end of history, when the Lord Jesus returns, the resurrection of the dead takes place, and the Final Judgment transpires. May that day come soon.

And so we see and read of the centrality of Jesus Christ to our existence and experience, as human beings, even as Christians. Jesus Christ is to us:

- the source of life
- the purpose for life
- the way of this life
- the greatest blessing of life
- the possession of life
- the source of meaning for life
- the source of power for this life
- the assurance of present life
- the promise of future life

Jesus Christ is to us life itself. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the *Life*. He is our peace. He is our hope. He is our very life. Let us all who believe on Him, confess that we are in Him, seek to be satisfied in Him, even as we confess that we are complete in Him, being content with Him, all to the glory of God.

Let us close with a few words from the classic book by **Isaac Ambrose**, *Looking Unto Jesus*:

In this knowledge of Christ, there is an excellency above all other knowledge in the world; there is nothing more pleasing and comfortable, more animating and enlivening, more ravishing and soul contenting; only Christ is the sun and center of all divine revealed truths, we can preach nothing else as the object of our faith, as the necessary element of your soul's salvation, which does not some way or other, either meet in Christ, or refer to Christ; only Christ is the whole of man's happiness, the Sun to enlighten him, the Physician to heal him, the Wall of fire to defend him, the Friend to comfort him, the Pearl to enrich him, the Ark to support him, the Rock to sustain him under the heaviest pressures, "As a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of waters in a dry place and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. 32:2).

Only Christ is that ladder between earth and heaven, the Mediator between God and man, a mystery, which the angels of heaven desire to pry, and peep, and look into (1 Pet. 1:12). Here is a blessed subject indeed; who would not be glad to pry into it, to be acquainted with it? "This is life eternal, to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent" (John 17:3). Come then, let us look; on this Sun of righteousness: we cannot receive harm but good by such a look; indeed by looking long on the natural sun, we may have our eyes dazzled, and our faces blackened; but by looking unto Jesus Christ, we shall have our eyes clearer, and our faces fairer; if "the light of the eye rejoice the heart" (Prov. 15:30), how much more, when we have such a blessed object to look upon? As Christ is more excellent than all the world, so this sight transcends all other sights; it is the epitome of a Christian's happiness, the quintessence of evangelical duties, "Looking unto Jesus."

Now this is a foundational and essential tenant of the Christian faith, the incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. One must know and believe the biblical truth respecting this matter. This is essential to being a true Christian. He is the Second person of the Holy Trinity, who took upon Himself a human nature. He remained God, but He also became a man, in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This is the teaching of the incarnation. God became flesh and dwelt among us. And so, God the Father sent His Son into the world to become one of us. The Son of God left heaven and came down and His glory was clothed or hidden from physical view in the body of Jesus Christ. He did this in order to save His people from their sins and to enable them one day to return with Him to dwell forever in the presence of God as children within God's family.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20f)
