

V. The Preeminence of Christ

March 3/4, 2010

Colossians 1:15-20

Aim: To glory in the matchless preeminence of Christ, who is supreme over the Church and indeed over all Creation.

Of all the Bible's teaching about Jesus Christ, none is more significant than Colossians 1:15-19. This dramatic and powerful passage removes any needless doubt or confusion over Jesus' true identity. Much of the heresy threatening the Colossian church centered on the Person of Christ. The heretics, denying His humanity, viewed Christ as one of the many lesser descending spirits that emanated from God. The idea that God Himself could become man was absurd to them. Thus, they also denied His deity. This in fact, was the most serious aspect of the Colossian heresy. Before getting to other issues, Paul makes an emphatic defense of the crucial doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

In this section, Paul is dealing with the objections raised by the false teachers in Colosse. It is as if they were saying, 'Yes, Christ is certainly enough to guarantee the forgiveness of sins, but for a truly effective Christian life some additional blessing is needed. You require something else beyond what Christ can do, something from some other source (e.g., worship of angels, or praying to saints). Or you need a further blessing from Christ Himself, since the blessings of the Christian life come to you in stages – first conversion, then a deeper experience of "fullness.'" Paul's answer deals with these objections to the sufficiency of Christ. His intention was to leave us no doubt that Jesus is all that we could possibly ever want or need as a Savior. Verses 15-20 are the most closely reasoned presentation of the supremacy of Christ anywhere in the Bible. How can our faith be deficient if we place it in such a magnificent Savior as the One Paul describes?

This passage, the most famous in the letter, is one of the Christological high points of the New Testament. The most common explanation for the syntactical distinctiveness of this passage is that Paul is here quoting traditional material, a 'hymn' or confession about Christ. Paul may have composed the whole passage from the ground up, used a traditional text, or taken over and modified an existing text for his own purposes.

But why bring in this high Christology here? The Christology serves the greater purpose of the letter by setting forth Christ as the exclusive instrument through whom God created the universe (vv. 15-17) and through whom He is in the process of pacifying the universe (vv. 18-20). The word *pas* (variously translated 'all,' 'every,' 'each'), occurring eight times in these verses, is the thread that binds the verses together. Whatever precise form the false teaching at Colossae took, it is at least clear that it was tending to question Christ's exclusive role in providing spiritual growth and security, and thereby, His exclusive role in the universe at large. The false teachers, it appears, argued from cosmology to spirituality: because the universe was filled with spiritual powers of various sorts, ultimate spiritual 'fullness' could be achieved only by taking them all into consideration (cp. 2:14-15). Thus Paul in the hymn places particular emphasis on the supremacy of Christ – in both creation and redemption – over the powers (vv. 16, 20).

Most scholars identify two basic stanzas on the basis of similar language and structure: the phrase 'who is' (vv. 15, 18); the word 'firstborn' (vv. 15, 18); the phrase (in reverse sequence) 'things in heaven and on earth' (vv. 16, 20); the sequence of assertion plus elaboration

Philemon/Colossians – Lesson 5

introduced with ‘for’ (*hoti*; vv. 16, 19); the sequence of three prepositions: ‘in’ (*en*; vv. 16a, 19) – ‘through’ (*dia*; vv. 16b, 20a) – ‘for’ (*eis* vv. 16b, 20).

A. Christ Is Supreme Over Creation (Col. 1:15-17)

1. The God of All Things (1:15a)

‘He is the image of the invisible God.’

That God is invisible is a given in both the Old and New Testaments (cp. 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27). As John puts it, ‘no one has ever seen God’ (Jn. 1:18); he is, as Paul puts it here, ‘invisible’ (*aoratos*).

The English word ‘image’ comes from the Greek word *eikōn*, from which we derive our word ‘icon.’ This means ‘an image or representation.’ Icons represent the true object. Sometimes the Greek word itself meant a picture, something that looks like, or represents, something else. In describing Christ as ‘the image of the invisible God’, Paul takes us back to the creation of man in Genesis 1:26-27. Every human being is made in the image of God. Although man is the *eikōn* of God (cp. 1 Cor. 11:7), man is not a perfect image of God. The Fall ruined the original image of God in man.

Paul had something bigger in mind when he called Jesus the *eikōn* of God. Unlike man, Jesus Christ is the perfect, absolutely accurate image of God. He did not become the image of God at the incarnation, but has been that from all eternity. Paul wanted his readers to understand that Christ resembles God to such a degree that there is an exact match (cp. Heb. 1:3). The Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father Almighty are completely alike in every respect. Neither is the tiniest fraction more divine than the other (cp. Jn. 1:18).

From this kind of usage we can say that Jesus is the portrait of God. However, the meaning goes even beyond this because being the *eikōn*, the image, of God also carries the idea of revealing the personal character of God. Christ as ‘the image of the invisible God’ is not just a plaster representation of Him, but the revelation of what God is really like. Paul emphasizes that Jesus is both the representation and manifestation of God. He is the full, final, and complete revelation of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is much greater than a lovely picture of God; He is no second-rate emanation from the true God, a Gnostic step in the ladder to the true God – He *is* God, God in human flesh.

A major question in Jewish theology at the time, with parallels in the Greco-Roman world, was this: where can God be seen? In this respect, Colossians 1:15 is similar to John’s depiction of the ‘Word’ in 1:1-18, and to Hebrews 1:3. The opening line of our hymn may, then, identify Christ as that original image in accordance with which human beings were created.

2. The Heir of All Things (1:15b)

‘The firstborn over all creation.’

The first half of verse 15 presents Christ in unique relationship to God; the second half asserts His unique relationship to ‘creation’ (*ktiseōs*).

In the fourth century AD, a group known as the Arians seized on this phrase and claimed that it meant that Jesus was merely the first being that God created. They coined the slogan: ‘There once was when he was not.’ Arius’s views stimulated considerable Christological reflection and

Philemon/Colossians – Lesson 5

resulted in the Nicene Creed's affirmation that Christ was 'eternally begotten of the Father, ... begotten, not made, of one Being (*homoousios*) with the Father.

Their modern counterparts, the Jehovah's Witnesses, use this verse in the same way. They argue that it speaks of Christ as a created being, and hence He could not be the eternal God. They have a considerable problem. Such an interpretation by Arian groups completely misunderstands the sense of *prōtotokos* ('firstborn') and ignores the context.

Paul is in fact using the language of inheritance and sonship. Although *prōtotokos* can mean firstborn chronologically (cp. Luke 2:7), it refers primarily to position, 'first in rank or honor' (cp. Ps. 89:27; Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9). Psalm 89 is especially important for Colossians 1:15, since Psalm 89 rings with messianic allusions, and Paul has just been describing Christ in messianic/kingly terms (vv. 12-14). The author of Hebrews also uses *prōtotokos* as a christological title in a messianic context (Heb. 1:6; cp. v. 5).

In both Greek and Jewish culture, the firstborn was the son who had the right of inheritance. He was not necessarily the first one born. (cp. Jacob vs. Esau). Jesus is called the 'firstborn of the dead' in Revelation 1:5 and firstborn in relationship to the church in Romans 8:29. In all the above references, firstborn clearly means highest in rank, not first created. It is clear that the word is used here in this sense of 'supreme over.'

There are many other reasons for rejecting the idea that the use of 'firstborn' makes Jesus a created being. Such an interpretation cannot be harmonized with the description of Jesus as *monogenēs* ('only begotten, 'unique') in John 1:18. We might well ask with the early church Father Theodoret how, if Christ was only-begotten, could He be first-begotten? And how, if He were first-begotten, could He be only-begotten? How could He be the first of many in His class, and at the same time the only member of His class? Yet such confusion is inevitable if we assign the meaning of 'first created' to 'firstborn.' Finally, if Paul meant to convey that Christ was the first created being, why did he not use the Greek word *prōtoktistos*, which means 'first created'?

If Paul were here teaching that Christ is a created being, he would be agreeing with the central point of the Colossian errorists. They taught that Christ was a created being, the most prominent of the emanations from God. That would run counter to his purpose in writing Colossians, which was to refute the false teachers at Colossae.

Interpreting *prōtotokos* to mean that Christ is a created being is also out of harmony with the immediate context. This statement is surrounded by others that demand that we accept that Jesus actually is Jehovah. Paul has just finished describing Christ as the perfect and complete image of God. The context of this passage makes Him Creator of everything that exists. How then could Christ Himself be a created being? The Scriptures also plainly teach that He has existed from all eternity (cp. Jn. 1:1; 8:58). As verse 17 states, 'He is before all things.' Christ existed before anything else was created (cp. Mic. 5:2). And only God existed before the creation.

Just as a firstborn son is the rightful heir to his father's property, all creation rightly belongs to Christ (cp. Heb. 1:2; Rev. 5:1-7, 13). Jesus not only owns each and every Christian by right of purchase; He owns the entire universe because he is the heir of all things. Paul meant that the highest honor belongs to Christ – He is completely supreme in creation!

Philemon/Colossians – Lesson 5

3. The Creator of All Things (1:16)

a) All Things (1:16a)

‘For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible.’

Why is Christ supreme? Because He is the Creator. His supreme role in creation is now cited as evidence of His preeminence. The extent of His creation is dazzling. It includes even the things in the heavens and the invisible. In fact, it even includes angels.

Paul maintains that Jesus made all things, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible. He refutes the false philosophic dualism of the Colossian heresy. Jesus is God, and He created the material universe.

Phrases like ‘in heaven (*ouranois*) and on earth (*gēs*),’ and ‘visible (*orata*) and invisible (*aorata*)’ are meant to be completely comprehensive. They are all inclusive. Everything is embraced; nothing is left out. ‘Heaven and earth’ is a common biblical merism, that is, a construction in which two elements function together to indicate a single whole: in this case, the created order, the universe (cp. Gen. 1:1). The second pair, ‘visible and invisible,’ is a less common merism. Likely it restates the first pair in chiasmic arrangement (‘heaven’ = ‘invisible’; ‘earth’ = ‘visible’).

b) All Powers (1:16b)

‘Whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.’

Some commentators think that both earthly rulers and heavenly rulers – spiritual beings – are intended. But it is more likely that all four terms are describing spiritual beings, and that they are elaborating the term ‘invisible.’ The Scriptures and Jewish literature reveal that the four descriptions ‘thrones ... powers ... rulers ... authorities’ refer to four classes of angelic powers. The Gnostics taught that Christ was a spiritual emanation from the true God, but here Paul boldly said that He is the true God who created everything, even the invisible spirit-world.

‘Thrones’ (*thronoi*) occurs very often throughout Scripture in its literal sense and often also in the metaphorical sense of that which the throne represents, power. But its placement here suggests that, like the other three in the series, it refers to personal beings. The second term in the series, ‘powers,’ translates a Greek word, *kyriotēs*, that occurs elsewhere in the New Testament and in Jewish writings as a reference to spiritual beings (Eph. 1:21; cp. 2 Pe. 2:10; Jude 8). The last two, ‘rulers’ and ‘authorities’ (*archai* and *exousiai*) are better known from the Pauline letters. They occur together in six verses as references to spiritual powers (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 2:10, 15; cp also *archē* in Rom. 8:38; in Titus 2:1 [and Luke 12:11], they refer to earthly authorities).

Also disputed is whether the four titles refer to all spiritual beings (e.g., angels, both good and bad) or to evil spiritual beings only. The inclusive language of this verse suggests that Paul is asserting Christ’s supremacy over the entire angelic realm. Paul’s emphasis here on Christ’s supremacy to these powers reminds the Colossians that they are utterly unable to rival Christ in any way.

The new teachers in Colossae had a great deal to say about spiritual powers, those forces that are unseen by man but are real nonetheless. The new teachers in Colossae had an appealing logic: the angels who never fell are noble beings, and we should try to recruit their assistance. By

Philemon/Colossians – Lesson 5

contrast, the angels who fell are very wicked, and we would do well to learn how to counteract them, or even placate them. Paul's response is clear-cut. By faith, we are joined to the Christ who made every one of them, in all their ranks and degrees. There is no need to be unduly overawed by the good angels, or to live in undue fear of the evil ones. They are created beings, answerable, as we are, to the God who made them. Any power or authority that spiritual beings possess is entirely dependent on Christ, the Lord.

Far from being an angel, as the Colossian errorists taught, Christ created the angels. Scripture is clear that Jesus is not an ange, but the Creator of angels. Jesus' relation to the unseen world, like His relation to the visible universe, proves He is God.

c) All for Him (1:16c)

'All things were created through Him and for Him.'

Christ is not only the Creator of creation, but He is also the end, the goal: 'all things were created (*ektistai*) by Him and for Him.' Christ stands at the 'beginning' of the universe as the one through whom it came into being, and He stands at its end as the goal of the universe (cp. Eph. 1:10). The vision of Christ in relationship to creation is thus comprehensive.

4. The Predecessor of All Things (1:17a)

'And He is before all things.'

The claim that Christ is 'before all things (*pro pantōn*)' is somewhat ambiguous in English and even more so in Greek. The preposition *pro* can designate either priority in time (e.g., Eph. 1:4) or priority in rank (1 Pe. 4:8). But the latter usage is quite rare in the New Testament, while all of Paul's uses of the word have a temporal sense. So this text is best taken as referring to Christ's preexistence.

Because He created all things, He was before all things. The false teachers had obviously been telling the Christians that Jesus was just one of the manifestations of the true God. In verse 17, 'He is before all things' can be rendered, 'He is the beginning' (cp. Gen. 1:1; Jn. 1:1). He is the source, the origin, of the entire created order. This is not simply a statement about the timing of the event – namely that creation happened before anything else. It means that the eternal Son, who had existed from all eternity together with the Father, was the beginning from which the whole created universe sprang.

5. The Sustainer of All Things (1:17b)

'And in Him all things consist.'

The hymn thus far has focused on Christ's role at the beginning and at the end of creation. Now the focus turns to the present role of Christ in creation. The verb here (*synestēken*, from *synistēmi*) means in this context, 'hold together, 'cohere.'

In verse 17, Paul reaches the apex of his argument: Christ is superior to creation because He is the sustainer. Not only did Christ create all that exists, but it only continues to exist because He is actively involved in holding it together. He maintains the delicate balance necessary to life's existence. He quite literally holds all things together. What holds the universe together is not an idea or a virtue, but a person: the resurrected Christ. He is the power behind every consistency in the universe. He is gravity and centrifugal and centripetal force. He is the energy of the universe. Without Him, electrons would not continue to circle nuclei, gravity would cease to

Philemon/Colossians – Lesson 5

work, and the planets would not stay in their orbits. The perfect tense here tells us that He continues now to hold all things together, and that apart from His continuous activity, all would disintegrate.

When we truly understand what is being said here, it is amazing that we should ever look anywhere else for meaning and purpose in life. Since He is the Creator who holds all things together, He knows how to best fix and order our lives.

B. Christ Is Supreme Over the Church (Col. 1:18-20)

Christ is sovereign over the Church, just as He is sovereign over creation. The believers in Colossae needed to stand in awe of the surpassing greatness of Christ, so, in words packed with significance, the apostle held Him up before their astonished gaze. As Paul develops his argument, the focus shifts from Christ as Creator to Christ as Redeemer. Without the colossal power that called the worlds into being, He would not be able to save anyone at all.

1. The Head of the Church (1:18a)

‘And He is the head of the body, the church.’

There are many metaphors used in Scripture to describe the ‘church’ (*ekklēsia*). It is called a family, a kingdom, a vineyard, a flock, a building, and a bride. But the most profound metaphor, one having no Old Testament equivalent, is that of a Body (*sōma*). The church is a Body, and Christ is the head of the Body. This is a metaphor that is distinctive to Colossians (1:24; 2:19; 3:15) and Ephesians (1:23; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30). He controls every part of it and gives it life and direction.

The apostle uses this same metaphor as Christ being the head of the body in Ephesians 5:23, but here his main concern is to point out that Christ is indispensable. As members of His Body we are totally dependent upon the Head (*kephalē*), Christ, for direction. In the ancient world, the head was conceived to be the governing member of the body, that which both controlled it and provided for its life and sustenance. Without a head a body cannot function. There will be no sight, hearing, thought processes, intelligence, or direction. It is not that Jesus is a valuable addition, a useful acquisition; without Him the church cannot be. Without Him, all is lost. To be without Christ is to be completely without hope.

‘Who is the beginning.’

Archē (‘beginning’) is used here in the twofold sense of source and primacy. The Greek has a wide variety of meanings, but the temporal idea of ‘beginning’ predominates. The church has its origins in Jesus. God ‘chose us in Him before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4). As head of the Body, Jesus holds the chief position, or highest rank in the church. As the beginning, He is its originator.

2. The Preeminent One (1:18b)

‘The firstborn from the dead.’

‘The firstborn from the dead (*nekrōn*)’ indicates that Christ is the first of a new humanity. This word ‘firstborn’ (*prōtotokos*) is repeated from verse 15, and it has the same meaning. Of all those who have been raised from the dead, or ever will be, Christ is the highest in rank. Paul was not arguing that Jesus was the first person to be raised from the dead. However, He was the most

Philemon/Colossians – Lesson 5

important of all who have been raised from the dead, because without His resurrection there could be no resurrection for others (cp. 1 Cor. 15:20ff.). He is the ‘founder’ of the new order of resurrection. He is the ‘firstborn’ (*prōtotokos*) among many brothers and sisters. We who expect to rise into the life of God owe it all to Him because He has risen for us.

‘That in all things He may have the preeminence.’

Christ’s supremacy is seen to be the result of his resurrection. This, of course, takes nothing away from the reality of Christ’s eternal sovereignty over all creation (vv. 15-17). But it reflects the common New Testament understanding of Christ’s resurrection as having established His power over a fallen and rebellious world in a new degree (Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:9-11).

As a result of His death and resurrection, Jesus has come to have first place in everything. He holds the ‘preeminence’ (*prōtenōn*). His place at the highest summit is unchallenged. He is exalted far above all. Is there a hint here that the new teachers were claiming a degree of eminence for themselves, as though they deserved some recognition for their role as intermediaries with the unseen world? It is always a temptation for Christian leaders to want a place in the sun, but the primacy belongs to Jesus. The church has but one head for the simple reason that He far overtops any possible rivals. There is no scope whatever for popes in the Christian world. This even applies to Protestant ‘popes,’ those empire-builders who treat local churches as small ponds where they can be the biggest fish.

3. The Fullness of God (1:19)

‘For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.’

Verse 19 shows us that the Lord Jesus was obviously not some distant emanation of the Godhead: ‘For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness (*pan to plērōma*) should dwell.’ This phrase could also be translated from the Greek as, ‘In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.’

Paul’s use of the word ‘fullness’ here was an intentional slap at the Gnostics, who later used the same word, *plērōma*, to denote the totality of all the thousands of divine emanations or lesser gods. Paul counters the false teaching in Colossae by stating that the fullness of deity is not spread out in small doses to a group of spirits, but full dwells in Christ alone (cp. 2:9). We might surmise that the false teachers in Colossae were inviting the Christians there to experience true ‘fullness’ by following their philosophy (2:8) and rules (cp. 2:16-23); to which Paul responds: the ‘fullness’ that you are seeking is to be found in Christ. Paul said, ‘No way! Jesus is not one of the lesser gods of the fullness. He is *the* Fullness!’ ‘Fullness’ here means that the totality of divine power and attributes is in Christ. Jesus Christ is the full ‘fullness’ of God. This means that we need look to no one except Jesus for the full revelation of God’s character. Only in Christ can ‘fullness’ be found.

All the fullness of the divine nature is joyously present in Jesus Christ. It follows that anyone who has a share in Christ has all that there is of God. Christ is inexhaustible. The treasures of divinity will never run out; the supply of grace is limitless. If we are joined by faith to Him, everything that exists in God becomes accessible to us.

4. The Reconciler of All Things (1:20)

‘And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.’

Philemon/Colossians – Lesson 5

In verse 20 it becomes clear that, having taken up residence in Christ, all the fullness of Godhead has been active in reconciliation. God in Christ is the great reconciler. This reconciliation has a cosmic dimension. Because of human sin, the entire universe is out of joint. By introducing the word ‘reconcile,’ Paul has given us a brutal reminder that there is something seriously at fault with the human race. There is only one source of reconciliation, the fullness of Godhead in Jesus Christ. There is no point looking for it anywhere else. The scope of this reconciliation is colossal. Just as the problem extends far beyond the human race, it is not merely human beings who are to be put right with God. Creation itself was affected by the Fall and the broken universe is to be restored.

Everything in the universe will be reconciled except that which rejects Him – which brings us the main focus of this verse: the reconciliation of sinners to Himself. The verb *katallassō* (‘to reconcile’) means ‘to change’ or ‘exchange.’ Its New Testament usage speaks of a change in a relationship. It refers to the restoration of fellowship between God and sinners. In every reference to reconciliation between God and man in the New Testament, it is God who takes the initiative (e.g., Eph. 2:16; Rom. 5:10-11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18-20). Reconciliation to God is an explicitly one-sided process.

There is another term for ‘reconcile’ that is used in Colossians 1:20, 22 – *apokatallassō*. It is a compound word, made up of the basic word for reconcile, *katallassō*, with a preposition added to intensify the meaning. It means thoroughly, completely, or totally reconciled. Paul no doubt used this stronger term in Colossians as a counterattack against the false teachers. Paul emphasizes that there is total, complete, and full reconciliation through the Lord Jesus. Inasmuch as He possesses all the fullness of deity (1:19; 2:9), Jesus is able to fully reconcile sinful men and women to God (1:20). Jesus is the agent through which God will accomplish the reconciliation of the universe.

Since at least the time of Origen, some interpreters have used this verse to argue for universal salvation: in the end, God will not (and often, it is suggested, *cannot*) allow anything to fall outside the scope of His saving love in Christ. Universal salvation is a doctrine very congenial to our age, and it is not therefore surprising that this verse, along with several others in Paul, is regularly cited to argue for this belief. Of course, this false teaching cannot be reconciled with the clear New Testament doctrine about the reality and eternity of Hell.

The wider creation in general suffers from the effects of humanity’s fall into sin and is in need of restoration. Paul picks up this point very clearly in Romans 8:19-22. Colossians 1:20 does not teach ‘cosmic salvation’ or even ‘cosmic redemption,’ but ‘cosmic restoration’ or ‘renewal.’ Through the work of Christ on the cross, God has brought His entire rebellious creation back under the rule of His sovereign power. Of course, this ‘peace’ is not yet fully established. The ‘already/not yet’ pattern of New Testament eschatology must be applied to Colossians 1:20.

God’s work in Christ has in view a reclamation of the entire universe, tainted as it is by human sin (cp. Rom. 8:19-22). That fallen human beings are the prime objects of this reconciliation is clear from the New Testament generally and from the sequel to this text (vv. 21-23). No true, lasting peace can come merely through the powerful words of those who, like the false teachers at Colosse, fail to put the cross at the center of their preaching. The ‘peace’ that God seeks is a peace that not only applies to humans in their relationship to God but also to humans in their relationship with one another (hence the mandate for social justice) and to humans in their

Philemon/Colossians – Lesson 5

relationship with the natural world (hence the mandate for a biblically oriented environmentalism).

While reconciliation is a thrilling possibility, it is far from cheap or easy. Peace between God and man and between a ruined cosmos and its Maker is only available because of the sufferings of Christ. Jesus bore the separation of sin so reconciliation could take place. The Cross is the ultimate evidence that there is no length the love of God will refuse to go in effecting reconciliation.

We should note here that ‘God was pleased’ to have the fullness dwell in Jesus and through Him to reconcile us. Salvation is God’s joyous work. What an inviting revelation to a lost world! It is God’s *pleasure* to give you all things. Have you responded to Him?

C. Conclusion

Even today, Christians are sometimes given the impression that although they might have Christ for their Savior, some vital added extra is missing. Something more is needed. Paul’s response to this line of reasoning is to elaborate on the greatness and splendor of Christ. This leaves us with an inescapable conclusion. The Lord of glory is Himself so wonderful that to insist that people need more than Christ is absurd. He cannot be excelled or surpassed. Every true Christian has been linked, with chains that cannot be broken, to the most wonderful person of them all, someone who represents God to mankind to the fullest and most complete degree, someone who not only existed prior to the creation of all things, but who participated in their creation. He is the head of the church, the first of a new humanity and the one in whom God is present to the utmost extent. To inform people that they need to move on from what they have in Christ is to insult them.

This passage closes by touching on our greatest need as human beings. For those who have failed to meet their standard that God has set, reconciliation is an urgent necessity. Is God willing to be at peace with us? No reader of this book need spend a day longer in uncertainty. Blood has been shed; a penalty has been paid and, for all who come in faith to Jesus Christ, our moral and spiritual debts have been cancelled.

We don’t know how the Colossians received this letter, but we can gauge our own reaction. Presented with such a Christ, the pearl of great price, should we hanker for more than we have in Him, or be amazed at what we have?

For next time: Read Colossians 1:21-29.