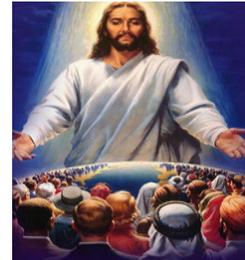


A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS*Part Five***Introduction**

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 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. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Colossians 1:18-23).

1. In the previous lesson we began a discussion of the glory of Christ; particularly His relation to God the Father (1:15a), and creation (1:15b-17). This lesson will discuss Christ’s relation to the church.
2. Let us remember that, the whole section (15-23) is to show Christ’s preeminence in all things. This means He must also be preeminent in relation to the church and redemption.

The Preeminence Of Christ In Relation To The Church – 1:18-23

**VII. THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST IN RELATION THE CHURCH**

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 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. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Colossians 1:18-23).

1. Head of the church:
 - a. The same Jesus who is the image of the invisible God (1:15) and the creator of all things (1:16) is “the head of the body, the church”. And who is able to dispute that He qualified for such?
 - 1) This metaphor of the church as a “body” is also seen in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. In these passages the emphasis is on the fact that there is one body made up of many members with varying functions. The main point is the interdependency of the various parts of the body. The need (of the church) at the time dictated the emphasis.
 - 2) The need of those in Colossae was different, which is why he places particular emphasis on Christ as “the head of the body, the church”.
 - b. Let us consider the particular points Paul makes here and in Ephesians regarding Christ as head of the church:
 - 1) In reference to the human body, we know that it is the head that gives direction to the whole body. It goes without saying... remove the head and the body will cease to function (it will die). The point, then, is that Christ is the head of His body, the church, and He directs the whole body. Paul says that Christ is “above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named” (Ephesians 1:21) and that God has “put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:22). This is why we must “do all in the name of [i.e., by the authority of] the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17).

- 2) In reference to the human body, we know that it is the head that regulates many functions and “gives life” to the body. The point, then, is that Christ is the head of His body, the church, and supplies spiritual life to each member of the body. Paul says that each one is to “grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ” (**Ephesians 4:15**), and it is from the head, Christ, that “the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (**Ephesians 4:16**).

Christ is the head of the body, the church: He directs or rules the body, and He supplies spiritual life and nourishment to each member of the body. If any member is not growing, then it is either due to not being subject to Him or not receiving spiritual nourishment from Him, or both! In order to grow, then, one must learn to submit to the head and receive spiritual food from Him.

- c. What Paul sets forth regarding Christ as the head most likely counters some false teaching of the Gnostics.

- 1) In Christ, a Christian has all he needs: Christ is both “the head of all principality and power” (**2:10**) and “the head of the body, the church” (**1:18**), which means that He is the source of all things (**1:16; 2:10**), and the source of the life of the church (**1:18a**). This is why Paul says that Christians are “complete in Him” (**2:10**).
- 2) The Gnostics, though, did not believe that one was “complete in Him” and sought more – a higher knowledge. They rejected the teaching of Christ as Lord over all things and Lord of the church. In calling Jesus the head, Paul exposes their error.

2. The beginning:

- a. We saw in the previous verses (**1:15-17**) that Jesus is the source of the physical creation. Here we see that Jesus is “the beginning” or source and life-source of the church, His new creation, over which He rules as head (**cp. 2 Corinthians 5:16-17; Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 6:15-16; 1 Peter 2:9-10**).

- b. As a further explanation of what he means, Paul again uses the term “firstborn” (he used this term earlier to show Christ’s relation to the universe - **1:15**).

- 1) Christ is the firstborn in relation to His new spiritual creation, the church. But a significant point is added – he is the firstborn “from the dead”. This defines *how* Christ is the beginning or source of His new spiritual creation, the church.
- 2) Jesus is the preeminent one among all the resurrected, being the first one to be resurrected to die no more. He is the one from whom all future resurrections are tied (**1 Corinthians 15:22-23**). Jesus’ resurrection is the foundation of the creation of His new spiritual body, the church (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 6:1-10; 1 Peter 3:21**). If Jesus were not raised from the dead, there could be no church. “The resurrection of Christ is the event of all events which creates the church” (Walton Weaver).

3. Paul has shown that Jesus is preeminent over the material universe. He has also shown that He is the source of, and has the primacy over His new creation, the church. Paul has, then, shown that He is preeminent in all things. All these things did not happen by chance, but by design; it was God’s purpose.

- a. The word “for” (**at 1:19**) introduces the reasons for this affirmation: (i) God in all His fullness was pleased to dwell in the Son, and, (ii) God in all His fullness was pleased to reconcile all things to Himself through the blood of the cross.

- b. The word “fullness” was likely chosen by Paul to combat the false teaching of the Gnostics – they believed that a series of emanations or powers existed between God and man, which meant that any communication between God and man had to pass through all these emanations (in effect, mediators). “Those who thought in this way would be careful to treat those powers with becoming respect. But the whole of this theosophical apparatus is undermined here in one simple, direct affirmation: the totality of divine essence and power is resident in Christ. He is the one, all-sufficient intermediary between God and the world of humanity, and all the attributes of God - are disclosed in him” (Bruce).

4. Finally, Paul makes three points:

- a. They were once alienated and enemies of God. This was because of their disposition of mind; a disposition that resulted in “wicked works”. But now they were reconciled to God “in the body of His flesh through death” (1:21-22a).
- b. The purpose of this reconciliation is “to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (1:22b).
- c. However, it is essential that all Christians remain faithful unto death. We must “continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (1:23).

Applications

1. Paul states very clearly that Christ is **the** head of the body, the church. The head, of course, directs the body, which is why some have sought to usurp the headship to gain control. It may be a particular individual that is declared head of the church or it may be a body of men that declare themselves the head of the church. If we subject ourselves to such self-appointed heads, then we are rejecting the headship of Christ and allowing ourselves to be controlled by men.
2. This is similar to the first application, but I’m thinking now about men that may try to assume the headship of a local church. It could be one of the elders or perhaps the preacher who seeks preeminence and power. John spoke of one such man called Diotrephes, “who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us” (3 John 1:9). His evil deeds included “ranting against us [the apostles] with evil words. And not content with these, neither does he himself receive the brothers. And he forbids those who would, and casts them out of the church” (3 John 1:9). So we need to remain alert and watch out for those that seek to preeminence and control over the congregation’s faith.
3. Some people (even those claiming to be Christians) reject the teaching that Jesus is God. But Paul leaves us in no doubt as to the identity of Jesus: He is the image of the invisible God, the creator of all things, the sustainer of all things, and in Him all the fullness (the sum total of the divine perfection, powers, and attributes) of God dwells. It is impossible to say such things of a mere man.
4. Reconciliation with God is only possible through Christ because God has reconciled all things to Himself through the blood of Christ of His cross. This accords with what Peter said, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
5. The purpose of our redemption in Christ is that we might be holy and blameless before God. But let us not forget that we must ensure that we continue in the faith, grounded, and moved not away from our hope. In another place Paul says we must “work out your own salvation” (Philippians 2:12). The “once saved always saved” doctrine is false.