

**Lesson 5**

**Colossians 1:15-23**

Colossians 1:5-20 is probably the best-known passage within the book of Colossians, and a primary passage in the New Testament that speaks of Jesus' nature and roles.

**Colossians 1:15-20**

- 15 He is the image of the invisible<sup>a</sup> God, the firstborn<sup>b</sup> of all creation<sup>c</sup>.
- 16 For by<sup>d</sup> him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible<sup>e</sup>, whether thrones or dominions or rulers<sup>f</sup> or authorities<sup>g</sup>—all things<sup>h</sup> were created through<sup>i</sup> him and for him.
- 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together<sup>j</sup>.
- 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning<sup>k</sup>, the firstborn from the dead<sup>l</sup>, that in everything he might be preeminent<sup>m</sup>.
- 19 For in him all the fullness of God<sup>n</sup> was pleased to dwell<sup>o</sup>,
- 20 and through him <sup>p</sup>to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his<sup>q</sup> cross.

- Notes
- a NJB "unseen"
  - b REB "primacy over"; CEB "first over"
  - c KJV "every creature"
  - d ASV, NJB, NRSV, REB, NAB, NIV "in"
  - e REB "also the invisible orders of thrones, ..."
  - f KJV, ASV, NAB "principalities"
  - g KJV, ASV, NJB, NRSV, REB, NAB "powers"
  - h REB "whole universe"
  - i KJV "by"
  - j KJV, ASV "consist"
  - k REB "its origin"
  - l REB "the first to return from the dead"; CEB "the first over the dead"
  - m NRSV, NASU, HCSB, CEB "have first place"; NJB, REB sim., NIV sim. "be supreme"
  - n NAB omits "of God"
  - o KJV "it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell" (sim. – ASV, NJB, NRSV, REB, NASU, HCSB, NIV)
  - p NRSV inserts "God was pleased"
  - q NJB "by his death on"

**Comments / Questions**

1. This passage speaks of the three relationships that Jesus maintains. For each relationship, what are the relations that Paul identify:
  - 1) His Relationship to God
  - 2) His Relationship to the Creation
  - 3) His Relationship to the Church

What are the key words in this passage?

2. John 1 and Hebrews 1 forms a triad with Colossians 1 in that they each highlight the same three relationships: (†) Relationship to God, (††) Relationship to Creation, and (†††) Relationship to Church.

<b>Jesus Christ</b>		
<b>John 1:1-5, 14-18</b>	<b>Colossians 1:15-20</b>	<b>Hebrews 1:1-4</b>
†† All Things made through Him.	† He is the Image of God.	God Spoke: - By Prophets.
††† In Him was Life.	†† Firstborn of Creation: - By Him and For Him All Created.	† - By His Son.
†† He became Flesh.	- Through Him All Hold Together.	†† Heir of All Things
† We saw His Glory from the Father.	††† He is Preeminent: - Head of the body. - The Beginning. - The Firstborn of the Dead.	†† World Created through Him.
††† From Him We received Grace.	† Fullness of God dwelt in Him.	† Radiance of God's Glory; Exact Imprint of God's Nature.
	††† All Reconciled through Him; making Peace by Blood of the Cross.	†† Upholds Universe by Word of His Power.
		††† Made Purification of Sin; Sat Down at Right Hand of God.

3. Looking closer at some of these relationships, answer briefly the following basic questions:
- What is the point of saying the Jesus is the "image of the invisible God"?
  - Based on the language alone, in what two ways might Jesus be the "firstborn of all creation"? (Both need not be true.)
  - The ESV says that "by him all things were created" (v.16). Other versions say "in him ..." Any difference?
  - What is another way of saying that "in Him all things hold together"?
  - In what two ways might Jesus be "the firstborn from the dead"?
  - What does it mean to reconcile all things "in heaven" unto himself?
4. Paul uses the metaphor of a body in describing Christ's relationship to the church: Christ "is head of the body". What does being "head" signify about Christ? One scholar wrote: "The title indicates His position of authority as Lord (Col. 1:18; cf. 3:15; Eph. 5:23), but at the same time it means that He is the source of the spiritual life which flows through the body and nourishes the members (Eph. 3:15f.; Col. 2:19)" [Marshall, *The Work of Christ*, (Paternoster Press, 1969), p.86]. Some dispute the dual reference to both *authority* and *source* and argue for one or the other. What do you think?

[Note: This argument takes on more heat when the husband is said to be "head" of the wife (Eph. 5:23). Egalitarians argue that it only means 'source' (as the head of a river is its source).]

5. Compare this passage to Ephesians 1:19-23. In Colossians, Christ is superior to every power ("thrones...dominions...rulers... authorities") since the creation. How is Christ relationship to such powers describe in Ephesians?

**Colossians 1:21-23**

- 21 And you, who once were alienated<sup>a</sup> and hostile<sup>b</sup> in mind, doing evil deeds<sup>c</sup>,  
22 he<sup>d</sup> has now reconciled<sup>e</sup> in his<sup>f</sup> body of flesh<sup>g</sup> by his death, in order to present<sup>h</sup> you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,  
23 if indeed<sup>i</sup> you continue<sup>m</sup> in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of<sup>n</sup> the gospel<sup>o</sup> that you heard, which has been proclaimed<sup>p</sup> in all creation<sup>q</sup> under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became<sup>r</sup> a minister<sup>s</sup>.

- Notes
- a NJB, NRSV "estranged"
  - b KJV, ASV, REB "enemies"
  - c NJB "hostile intent through your evil behavior"; REB, CEB sim. "as your evil deeds showed"; HCSB, NAB sim., NIV sim. "because of your evil deeds"
  - d REB "God"
  - e KJV "yet now hath he reconciled" is part of v.21
  - f REB "Christ's"
  - g REB adds "and blood"; HCSB, CEB, NIV "physical body"
  - h REB "to bring him into is presence"
  - i NRSV, NAB "provided that"
  - m NJB, REB, NAB "persevere"
  - n NJB, NRSV "hope promised by"
  - o CEB "good news"
  - p KJV, ASV, REB, CEB "preached"
  - q KJV, NJB, NRSV, NAB, NIV "every creature"
  - r KJV "am made", NASU "was made"
  - s NJB, NRSV, CEB, NIV "servant"

**Comments / Questions**

1. Paul expands his comments about the reconciliation in Christ by building upon what he said in v.20.
  - a. How did Christ reconcile the Colossians?
  - b. For what purpose?
2. V.23 gives an important "IF". The Colossians will only be presented by Christ if they "*continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel*".
  - a. To shift from the gospel seems clear, but what does "*not shifting from the hope of the gospel*" mean"?
  - b. This is the second time specifically mentions that the Colossians have "*heard*" of the hope within the gospel. (1:5; 2:23)
3. Paul, by the side, comments that the gospel has been preached "*in all creation*" (KJV "*to every creature*"). What does that mean?