

Complete: Over All – Colossians 1:15-20

A couple of years ago someone gave Bethany and I tickets to go see the Detroit Symphony Orchestra play downtown. We enjoy concerts so we happily went. One of the realities of seeing a symphony orchestra play is that they have guest musicians and conductors regularly involved in shows. So when you get the program for the evening they include an introduction to these musicians and the conductor. It will tell you about the productions he or she has been involved in, who they have played with and any significant venues they have played in or conductor in.

While I like classical music, I know virtually nothing about the classical music and symphony orchestra world. But I read the resumes of those involved in the show and inevitably come away impressed. I'll point out to Bethany some name or venue I heard mentioned one time and then I'll feel like we are really in for a good show that night. And that's entirely the point of the introductions they write. They are meant to put the skill and background of the conductor and musicians up front. You are meant to read them and feel confident that the person playing the violin has experience and knows what he or she is doing.

Throughout the book of Colossians Paul tells believers that they have all they need in Christ and He consistently proclaims Jesus Christ to them. Listen to 1:28, 2:3, 2:6-7, and 2:10. Just to name a few places.

But none of this means anything unless that name Jesus Christ has a resume. Who exactly is Jesus and why do we proclaim Him? Why do we tell people about Him? What makes Him so special and unique? Remember, one of the key arguments Paul is making in Colossians is that we have all we need because we are joined to Christ and He is fully sufficient and complete in Himself. Today we are going to see Paul's explanation of the completeness of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20.

So far in the first chapter of Colossians here's how Paul has unfolded his letter. It's quite simple. He thanks God for the gospel's work in them in 1:3-8 and then he prays for them to be filled with the knowledge of God's purposes and plans so that they can walk worthy of God in 1:9-14. He ends this prayer by thanking God for

the inheritance they have because of Christ's work. Look specifically at verses 13-14.

Since he just mentioned Jesus Christ, the beloved Son, he's now going to give the meat of his teaching about Christ for the whole letter. This is the resume, the background, the heart of what Paul has to say about Jesus Christ. And his point is that Jesus reigns and rules over all for His glory and is therefore fully sufficient for us. Here's what we will look at this morning. **2 Realms Over Which Jesus Reigns for His Glory.**

1. Supreme Over All Creation (vv. 15-17)

Verses 15-20 are structured magnificently and are most likely a hymn or song of praise to Christ. There are a ton of details in structure that I could show you this morning, but I want to make this as simple and clear as possible for you. So, there are two parts or sections to this hymn of praise and both have the word "firstborn" in them. Look at verse 15 and then at verse 18. Jesus is the firstborn over creation and the firstborn over the church or the reconciled. These are our two realms this morning.

Once you see the two uses of the word firstborn, now I want you to look at the word "for" at the beginning of verse 16 and the word "for" at the beginning of verse 19. Paul uses this word to give the explanation for how Jesus is the "firstborn" on these two realms. Pretty simple and straightforward.

So, we need to be pretty clear on what this word "firstborn" indicates if we are going to rightly understand Jesus and walk in Him as Colossians 2:6-7 says. In our culture today the word "firstborn" simply means that child that was biologically born before the others. I have one younger brother who was born 3 ½ years after me. In our culture this word clearly indicates that the "firstborn" came into existence at some point. He or she was born into the world.

Some religions have taken this statement from Colossians 1 that Jesus is the "firstborn" of all creation and said, see, Jesus is not God and the Trinity is not a true doctrine because Jesus was the first created being. The problem with this

explanation is that it fails to understand the OT background of this word and the way it is used right here in Colossians 1.

The “firstborn” in the OT could include being born first as a matter of time, but more often it indicated the rank or status of the “firstborn”. The firstborn received a greater share of the inheritance and family honor. The firstborn had the place of supreme privilege and sometimes the “firstborn” was not actually born first. Jacob became the “firstborn” as the birthright changed hands from Esau to him. The best way to understand the meaning of the word “firstborn” as it relates to Jesus is to listen to Psalm 89:26-27. These verses are speaking of the Davidic Messiah and king and they focus completely on his priority and rank.

So, the OT meaning of firstborn focuses on pre-eminence and honor. Now notice the explanation given in verse 16. Jesus can't be a created being because He Himself created everything. Additionally, He is the image of the invisible God. The incarnate Jesus Christ makes the invisible God known to us. This is because He is God.

Paul wants us to understand Jesus as ruling and reigning over all creation. Nothing is outside of His authority, and He sits in honor and supremacy over all of it. Notice how many times the language in verses 15-17 is comprehensive. Paul gives categories in verse 16 that cover everything. Also notice that He created all of this for Himself, it all exists for Him, and He sustains it all.

It should be clear that Paul wants us to grasp Christ as the origin of creation, the sustainer of creation, and the purpose or goal of creation. There are a million applications of these truths, but let's talk about this. Creation is designed toward the honor and glory of Christ. The grain of the universe points toward Christ. In the ancient world all roads led to Rome and here all of creation leads toward the majesty and beauty of Jesus Christ. Does your life match this? Are you living with the grain of the universe as it has been put together? I think Paul is applying this truth in Colossians 3:17.

Unfortunately, so much of creation is not ordered toward the glory of Christ at the moment. This is how it's meant to be, but it's not how we see it currently. This

break between purpose and reality is why Paul even needs to talk about the second realm in verses 18-20.

2. Pre-Eminent Over Reconciliation (vv. 18-20)

Reconciliation is only necessary where there has been a breach and Paul assumes a breach between verses 17 and 18. God's original design was corrupted by human sin and the whole thing was knocked out of balance. Here's one of my favorite explanations of the disruption sin has caused in God's good world.

Perhaps one reason is that in the biblical worldview even when sin is devastatingly familiar, it is never normal. It is alien. It doesn't belong in God's world. Sin is always a departure from the norm and is assessed accordingly. Sin is deviant and perverse, an injustice or iniquity or ingratitude. Sin in the Exodus literature is disorder and disobedience. Sin is faithlessness, lawlessness, godlessness. Sin is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it—both transgression and shortcoming. Sin is a missing of the mark, a spoiling of goods, a staining of garments, a hitch in one's gait, a wandering from the path, a fragmenting of the whole. Sin is what culpably disturbs shalom. Sinful human life is a caricature of proper human life. So the biggest biblical idea about sin, expressed in a riot of images and terms, is that sin is an intruder, a notorious gate-crasher. Once in the world, the only way for it to survive is to become a parasite on goodness. –

Cornelius Plantinga

The question is, what did God do to restore order and to bring reconciliation? Christ became the firstborn from the dead. Look at verse 18. The second person of the Trinity, became the image of the invisible God and came into His creation. Think about that for a second. The one who made it all and reigns over it all became a part of His creation and took on the form of a servant. Look at verse 19. He never stopped being the one who made it all. He just also became man.

And as a man he lived without sin and died on a cross that He didn't deserve. And then He rose in victory over sin and death as the firstborn from the dead that in everything He might be preeminent. Verse 18 says that He is the beginning. The

beginning of what? The New Creation. He's the source, the principle and the initiator.

God's original creation was corrupted by sin and rebellion and was plunging further into death and destruction. God did not cast it aside or say He was done with it. Instead, He showed up and the new creation broke into the old. You see, these two realms are not separate from one another. The new creation enters the old and begins the process of remaking it through the reconciliation brought by Christ. Look at verse 20.

And where is this new creation to be found at the moment? Look back to verse 18. In the church. He's the head. The source and the life of the church and so we always look to Him. We always proclaim Him and walk in Him and cling to Him.

So, let's talk about application for a minute. What does this passage mean for us? Well, it's a complicated text with lots of big ideas and a detailed structure. But the message is quite simple. Jesus reigns over all creation and over the new creation. He is first place and deserving of honor, praise, and glory from us for who He is and what He has done. Do you live as if this is true? This is the heart of the message of Colossians. Recognize these truths about Christ and live accordingly.

I read something recently about football coaches that says that the best football coaches have the ability to see things for what they are and not for how they want them to be. They can honestly look at a player and evaluate that player and how he will fit and perform. It's very easy to be too optimistic or too pessimistic, but what separates the best coaches is the ability to have the right perception of reality, at least on the football field.

How often do we live according to what we want to be true as driven by our sinful hearts instead of what is true? Paul lays out reality for us here. Christ is supreme over both realms. Respond accordingly. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 3/15/26

- What is the best concert, play, or performance you have been to?
- How does Colossians 1 lead up to this hymn in verses 15-20?
- What role does Colossians 1:15-20 play in the rest of the letter?
- What are the structural similarities between the two realms, verses 15-17 and verses 18-20?
- What does the word firstborn mean in the Old Testament?
- Why is it problematic for “firstborn” to mean first created being in Colossians 1:15?
- What are some ways it impacts our lives to understand that all of creation was made by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ?
- Why does it matter that sin is alien and not natural to the created order?
- What does it mean that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead?
- What are some implications of the reality that Christ is the head of the church?

- We didn't discuss this in the sermon, but could this phrase in verse 20 "and through him to reconcile to himself all things" indicate universal salvation? Why or why not?
- What are some ways it helps us to remember that Colossians 1:15-20 give us reality as it is?

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