

Lesson 11

Nov. 16, 2025

Christ is Supreme

Christ is supreme over all things and deserves our complete devotion.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

From the letter to the Colossians, this lesson looks at three distinct aspects of the work of Christ: First, His role as Creator and sustainer of all things is recognized. Second, He is seen as the head of the church (the body of Christ), reconciling all things to God. Third, His role as the one who dwells within His followers, bringing them hope, is affirmed. From the beginning of creation to its culmination, Paul portrays Christ as supreme over all things. However, even as the Creator of all things, Christ suffered and died on behalf of His creation. But the ongoing supremacy of Christ was revealed in His resurrection, which provides hope for all who follow Him.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although Paul may have traveled through Colossae (in modern-day Turkey) during his third missionary journey, he did not plant the church there. He indicates he had never personally met the Christians living there (2:1); however, Paul worked closely with a Christian leader named Epaphras, who as a Colossian (4:12). Some believe Epaphras (almost certainly a Gentile) may have planted churches in cities of Ephesus, Colosse, and Hierapolis. Historically, this area had a large Jewish population that thrived in this pagan region.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. CHRIST, CREATOR OF ALL THINGS: Colossians 1:1-2, 12-17.

- A. Sharers of the inheritance (1-2, 12-14)
- B. Christ, the Creator and Sustainer (15-17)

2. CHRIST, HEAD OF THE CHURCH: Colossians 1:18-23.

- A. The Supremacy of Christ (18-20)
- B. Christ's Work of Reconciliation (21-23)

3. CHRIST, OUR HOPE OF GLORY: Colossians 1:24-29.

- A. The Mystery Revealed (24-27)
- B. The Ongoing Work of Christ (28-29)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. CHRIST, CREATOR OF ALL THINGS: Colossians 1:1-2, 12-14.

A. Sharers of the Inheritance Colossians 1:1-2, 12-14

Paul began the letter to the church at Colosse with his standard greeting, which identified the senders, the intended recipients of the letter, and expressions of goodwill. As with some of his other letters, Paul included Timothy in the greeting as a co-sender of the letter (v.1). It is possible that Timothy helped Paul write the letter, and his inclusion in the greeting suggests Timothy was well-known by at least some of the people in the church. As Paul did in other letters, he addressed the recipients as “saints” (v.2), which is from the Greek word ‘hagios,’ meaning “holy ones.” Followers of Jesus Christ are consecrated to Him and, therefore, set apart for His service – a role the Colossian Christians had embraced, for they were addressed as “faithful brethren” (v. 2).

Paul expressed his gratitude that God had “qualified” (v. 12 NKJV) the Colossians to be part of God’s kingdom. This qualification came as a result of the Colossian Christians being “delivered ... from the power of darkness, and ... translated ... into the kingdom of his dear Son” (v. 13). They had submitted to the authority of Christ, who rules in the kingdom established through his sacrificial death and subsequent exaltation. This idea of being delivered from the power of darkness is seen again in the following statement declaring that redemption had been provided through the blood of Christ and by which the Christians in Colossae had received “forgiveness of sin” (v. 14).

B. Christ, the Creator and Sustainer Colossians 1:15-17

Paul shifted his attention from the Colossian Christians and their freedom in Christ to focus on Christ himself. It appears that some in the church at Colosse were teaching false doctrines, which were challenging the teaching of the deity of Christ. This may be why Paul felt compelled to address this subject early in the letter. Paul began by declaring Jesus was “the image of the invisible God” (v. 15). While the full magnitude of God cannot be seen through human eyes, Paul wanted to assure the Colossians that what the world saw in Jesus was a divine and fully accurate representation of Almighty God. The divine nature of Christ is further emphasized by calling Him the “firstborn of every creature” (v. 15). The word firstborn indicated Christ’s divine status because, as God’s Son, Jesus was not a part of God’s creation but was eternally begotten from God himself and existed before anything was created.

Paul continued, stating that all creation resulted from Christ’s creative power. Whether in the heavens or on earth, things that are seen or that cannot be seen (spiritual beings and realities) were created by Christ. Even the kingdoms of the world, including “thrones ... dominions ... principalities, [and] powers” (v. 16), come from and are subservient to Jesus. Paul wanted the Colossians to understand Christ was responsible for creating “all things.” Also, all things were created “for” Him, meaning they were made according to His express purpose and pleasure, and only through Christ is creation sustained (v. 17). In response to false teachers who may have been questioning Christ’s power and divinity, Paul wanted there to be no doubt about either.

Paul’s assertion that believers have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and freed from the power of sin is an essential truth of the Christian faith. As followers of Christ, it is important to realize what was accomplished by Christ’s sacrificial death and then live in the freedom it has provided. Christ conquered sin and now lives within believers through the Holy Spirit, who gives believers victory over sin, shame, and darkness. We must consistently recognize the power of this truth in our lives so we may enjoy our freedom through faith in Jesus Christ.

2. CHRIST, HEAD OF THE CHURCH: Colossians 1:18-23

A. The Supremacy of Christ Colossians 1:18-20

Paul continued with his focus on the person and work of Christ, declaring Him to be “the head of the body, the church,” and preeminent above all (v. 18). Given the entrance of false teaching into the church and those who may have been jockeying for positions of authority, Paul reminded the believers when it comes to church leadership, Christ alone serves as the head. Therefore, no man or woman among them should ever be elevated in their minds or hearts above Christ’s divine identity, declaring that all of God’s “fullness” (v. 19) dwelt in Christ. It is possible that false teachers at Colosse prompted a doctrine whereby “fullness” could be attained by embracing their philosophical teachings (see 2:8). Paul responded that genuine fullness could be attained in none other than Jesus Christ.

God chose “to reconcile all things unto Himself,” and this reconciliation was accomplished by making “peace through the blood of His cross” (v. 20). Until Jesus was sent by the Father to reconcile the lost to Himself, the unredeemed were at odds with God. But through Christ, God bridged the hostility between humanity and divinity. Paul also expressed this pre-conversion condition of humanity in other places when he wrote that those whom Christ justifies “have peace with God” (Romans 5:1) but characterizes people before conversion as God’s “enemies” (v. 10). Before conversion, all people lived as enemies of God (Colossians 1:21) – a reality that makes God’s willingness to provide the sacrifice of His Son for our redemption even more astounding.

B. Christ’s Work of Reconciliation Colossians 1:21-23.

Paul proceeded to explain in greater detail the status of unredeemed humanity. He made it clear that he presented conversion in terms of reconciliation because, before conversion, people are “alienated” from and “enemies” of God (v. 21). It was not merely a matter of being in sin or people simply making bad choices; those who have not been brought into relationship with God through the redemptive work of Christ are portrayed as being in active opposition to God, placing themselves at odds with Him. Paul presents the Biblical understanding of those who are unrepentant and estranged from God as being far more serious than just being transgressors of God’s law. They are seen as being in open and active rebellion against God himself.

Paul then highlighted God’s dramatic response to such a serious situation, namely the reconciling death of His Son. Given the severity of the situation, an extraordinary solution from God was called for, which led to the loving provision of His Son, who gave His life as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Paul said the physical death of Christ provided the opportunity for sinners to become holy and free from any blemish or accusation (v. 22). The Colossian believers, who were formerly enemies of God, had been reconciled and freed from all of that was at the heart of the enmity between themselves and God. Paul declared reconciliation is “the hope of the gospel” (v. 23); it is the good news of restoration between God and humanity. Regarding their newfound faith in Jesus Christ, he warned the church that false teachers might try to lead them astray; therefore, they should “stand firmly” in their faith in Jesus Christ by staying true to the Gospel, to which he had “been appointed as God’s servant to proclaim it” (v. 23 NLT).

The fact that before coming to Christ, we were declared to be enemies of God reveals the seriousness of the divide that existed between God and unredeemed humanity. AS we look at our lives and the provision made through the death of Christ to bring us back into a relationship with God, we should remember how desperate our situation was and the depths from which

Christ brought us. This realization should be the foundation of our loving response to God and our gratitude for His loving actions. It should also be a motivating factor in all we do to worship and serve Him.

3. CHRIST, OUR HOPE OF GLORY Colossians 1:24-29

A. The Mystery Revealed Colossians 1:24-27

Soon after Paul's conversion, it was revealed to him how much he would suffer for the sake of Christ (Acts 9:16), and the theme of suffering was an integral part of his ministry, as revealed in his letters (2 Corinthians 1:5-7; 4:8-10; 11:23-29). Often, as seen in Colossians 1:24, suffering is portrayed as something to be endured with "joy" (Romans 5:3-5; 8:17; Philippians 3:10). Paul understood Christ's suffering did not exempt His followers from suffering, but it gave them an example to follow, showing how they could triumph over or through suffering. Paul also understood his suffering could ultimately lead to the greater growth of God's kingdom and served to benefit those to whom he ministered. His suffering was not meaningless; it served a purpose, which shaped Paul's attitude toward the suffering he experienced.

Paul then revealed the essence of the message for which he was so willing to suffer. He referred to it as "the mystery hidden" from previous generations, but now it was being revealed (Colossians 1:26-27). Paul here reveals the nature of that mystery, which was the expansion of God's kingdom to include not only the Jewish people but all who believe in Christ. Paul's ministry and suffering were validated through the indwelling presence of Christ in the lives of Gentiles and Jewish believers. Although this had been alluded to in the Old Testament, it would be fully realized in Christ, which offered hope of future glory for all who would put their faith in Him.

James L. Christensen said, "The purpose of Christianity is not to avoid difficulty, but to produce character adequate to meet it when it comes. It does not make life easy; rather, it tries to make us great enough for life."

B. The Ongoing Work of Christ Colossians 1:28-29

Building on the mystery of the Gospel reaching all people, Paul explained the Colossians were to proclaim Christ to everyone. Paul said the approach was made through "warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given" (v. 28NLT), highlighting two crucial aspects of proclaiming the Gospel. Furthermore, Paul identified the goal of warning and teaching – so they would reach full maturity in Christ. People were expected to grow in their knowledge and understanding of Christ, just as children are expected to grow into adulthood in the physical world.

Paul then shared some personal insights regarding the effort he devoted to fulfilling the ministry Christ had given him. He said he "labor[ed], striving' to accomplish the work Christ had called him to accomplish (v. 29). The idea of effort associated with following Christ is something found in the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew 7:13; Luke 13:24), and it is something Paul understood and accepted. It is important, however, not to miss Paul's observation in verse 29 that this striving was done "according to [Christ's] working, which worketh ... mightily" in him. Paul knew human effort alone would never be enough, so to accomplish the work he had been given, it would take the indwelling presence of Christ. This was something Paul said was available

to all and something that provided more than could be asked or imagined in the lives of Christians (Ephesians 3:20).

Paul was completely committed to fulfilling Christ's call on his life and determined not to let anything stand in his way. Although Paul suffered greatly for the cause of Christ, he persevered and pushed forward in his desire to be used by God to expand His kingdom. Paul proclaimed the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike, overcoming many obstacles along the way. Likewise, while surrounded by a culture that focuses on pleasure and leisure, we should embrace the importance of giving ourselves wholly to Christ's call upon our lives. We are God's light in a dark world.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

We must be willing to give ourselves to the mission of inviting others into God's family and rely on the power that Christ provides through the Holy Spirit to fulfill our roles as Jesus' witnesses.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Reflect on and then pray about how you might give yourself to serve Christ's mission to reach unsaved people with the Gospel.

WORKSHEET

The Connection Between Colossians and Philemon

To Know the Connection Between Colossians and Philemon, it is essential to read both books. The Letter to Philemon tells of a slave named Onesimus (Philemon 1:10; Colossians 4:9), who ran away from his master, Philemon, who with his wife Apphia and (likely) their son Archippus, had a church in their home in Colosse (Philemon 1:1-2; Colossians 4:17).

Onesimus, the Runaway Slave, Went to Paul in Rome (see Acts 28:16, 30-31). He stayed with Paul for a while and became a believer in Christ. Required by Roman law to return Onesimus to his master, Paul did so (Philemon 1:10-16), sending with him the Letter of Philemon.

When Paul Sent Onesimus back to his master in Colosse, he was accompanied by Tychicus, a ministry colleague of Paul who was carrying four letters from the apostle. Colossians 4:7-9, 16 says Tychicus was delivering Paul's letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Laodiceans (not in the Bible), while Ephesians 6:21-22 says he also carried Paul's letter to the Ephesian church.

An Obvious But Overlooked Reality emerges from these facts. There is a vital connection between the Letter to the Colossians and the Letter to Philemon. These two letters should be read and studied in conjunction with one another. Philemon and his family, and his slave Onesimus (after being returned by Paul), were all members of the Christian community of believers in Colosse.

Paul's Letter to Philemon suggests Paul led him to faith in Christ, although Paul had never ministered in person in Colosse (Colossians 2:1). But while Paul ministered in Ephesus (AD 54-57; Acts 19:1; 10; 20:16-17, 31), Philemon may have traveled to Ephesus and was led to faith in Christ by Paul (Philemon 1:19).

Epaphras, a Prominent Member of the Church in Colosse (Colossians 1:7; 4:12), who had traveled to Rome, and chose to remain with Paul in Rome ("my fellow-prisoner," Philemon 1:23), must have told Paul of an issue endangering the faith of the Christians in Colosse: teaching that faith in Christ was not sufficient for salvation, to which the core of Paul's reply is found in Colossians 2:6-10.

Christ Is Preeminent Colossians 1

1. As followers of Christ, why should we be thankful to the heavenly Father, vv. 12-14)?
2. What do the following verses reveal about Jesus Christ's identity and authority?
 - 15:
 - 16:
 - 17:
 - 18:
3. What does it mean to be "reconciled" to God, and how does it happen (vv. 21-22)?
4. Why and how must we as Christians "continue in the faith" (v. 23)?
5. What "mystery" has God revealed to His followers (vv. 26-27)?