

Text: Colossians 1:15-17

Title: Christ Above All

Truth: Christ, the very image of God, created and sustains everything.

Date/Location: July 26, 2015 at FBC

Introduction

Christ is above all...

- I. As the image of God.
- II. As the creator of everything.
- III. As the sustainer of everything.
- IV. As head of the church.
- V. As first glorified and resurrected one.
- VI. As the One in Whom dwells all the fullness of God.
- VII. As the reconciler and peacemaker for all things.

I. Christ is the Image of God, v. 15a

A. **Who is** or “He is” without question refers to the Son of God, the one “in whom” we have redemption (v. 14).

B. **Image.** Meaning is conveyed using words. This particular word is very important. It can refer to the form or appearance of something; to “an object shaped to resemble the form or appearance of something” like a portrait, or to refer to something “which has the same form as something else” (BDAG, s.v. “εἰκὼν”). The nuances are illustrated this way: he has the *appearance* of an angel (like Acts 6:15); that gold is fashioned into the *likeness* of Caesar (Matthew 22:20); and that boy is the very *image* of his father in every way. ‘Image’ is used with these nuances in several ways in the New Testament.

1. God made man in the image of God. Genesis 1:26, 1 Cor. 11:7

The image is the personal, spiritual, and moral similarity between humans and God. Infinite attributes were not communicated in this likeness, nor indeed can they ever be.

That image was damaged by sin. It remains (Gen. 9:6, James 3:9) but is distinguishable from the original image of God (Genesis 5:1-3).

2. Man made idols in the image of man. Romans 1:23 records how mankind made idols to have the appearance of themselves. The word *eikon* is sometimes used directly to refer to an idol (2 Chron. 33:7, Isaiah 40:19). While God made man in His image, man turned around and supposed he could remake gods in the image of man. He will

continue to pursue this foolish course until the Tribulation in Revelation 13:14, 14:9, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4).

3. Saved people are being conformed to the image of Christ. Romans 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18, Colossians 3:10. Believers will have bodies that have a heavenly likeness to them (1 Cor. 15:49).
 4. Hebrews 10:1 refers to things which are shadows in the Law of Moses and not the very form or substance of the heavenly realities.
 5. Christ as image of God, 2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15. Read the parallel in Hebrews 1:1-3 and soak up the bright glory of Christ's person.
- C. The Son of God is just like the Father. It is impossible to be more exactly like God than Jesus Christ is. The doctrine of the Trinity allows a personal likeness between the Father and Son, while maintaining a distinction of persons. This likeness is impossible to match in any other relationship inside or outside of the universe.
- D. Christ-likeness of God. If you want to know what the invisible God is like, you can see through the life, ministry, and words of Jesus Christ. It is impossible otherwise because God is Spirit, having no body to see. If you want to know God, the only way to do that is through knowing Christ. If you want to know God, meet Christ. Time to start reading the Bible!

II. Christ is the Creator of Everything, v. 15b-16

- A. Here we have the word "first-born" (proto-tokos), the misinterpretation of which has caused no end of trouble for the church. There are basically two ways the word can be used: birth order in a family, or metaphorically of the special status that one enjoys *like that of a firstborn son*. Various uses of first-born in the Bible include:
1. The first-born child of his parents, like Esau (Gen. 25:25). Jesus is first-born in this sense (Luke 2:7, Matt 13:55-56). The first son had special standing in the family as heir. It was the first-born that were killed in the Egyptian plague and which the sprinkled blood saved (Exodus 11:5, Heb. 11:28). The emphasis is equally on "first" and "born."
 2. The first-born animal, like those Abel brought for sacrifice (Gen. 4:4).
 3. The nation of Israel with its special place as God's "first-born" (Exodus 4:22). Here the emphasis is not on the "born" part of the word. It is on "first" and the status that a first-born son gets by virtue of being first.
 4. The Church of the first-born ones (Heb. 12:23), those who are attached by union to *the* First-born (Christ) and who will enjoy the resurrection

from the dead which is the next big event in God's program. Here again the emphasis is not on "birth" but on status. The birthing idea probably refers to the resurrection of life.

5. Of Christ as first resurrected from the dead and glorified, to be followed by many others (Col. 1:18, Rom. 8:29, Rev. 1:5). Once again, of "first-born", the "first" part is emphasized; the "born" part has to do with resurrection out of death, not procreation or generation.
 6. Of Christ as the one who is over all. Heb. 1:6, and here in Col. 1:15. This is simply Christ as first with the priority that entails. Christ as first-born refers to his status over, in charge of, and heir of, all things. The "born" part of the word fades into the background.
- B. Verse 16 offers the explanation as to why first-born refers to Christ's status over creation—He is firstborn precisely because He created everything. All things owe their existence to Him.
1. Correlate this passage with John 1:1-3 and Hebrews 1:1-3.
 2. The logic cannot be overcome that Christ is not a created being, because He created all things that are created. He is of a different sort, namely, the un-created sort. That "uncreated box" has only one being in it—God, eternally existing in three distinct persons who share a single essence. He always was, always will be, and never was not.
 3. The text states twice that He created everything, and then states *where* and then *what* in such a way as to say "everything" in three different ways:
 - In heaven and on earth, that is, everywhere.
 - Visible and invisible, like "material" and "not matter." One of my kids tried to trick me recently by asking, "Are germs invisible?" I picked up on the trick and said, "No, because they can be seen with a microscope." So they are part of the *visible* realm. God is Spirit, so is invisible (1 Timothy 1:17), as are all spirit beings like angels unless they change into visible form. Souls are invisible.
 - Thrones and dominions, perhaps earthly kingdoms, and rulers and authorities, perhaps the hierarchy of heavenly beings.
 4. No matter where you look or what you see or don't see, it was all created by Christ. It is notable that **all** occurs a bunch of times in this passage. Christ is over **all** creation; **all** things were created by Him; **all** things were created through Him and for Him.

5. We have to recognize that God existed before a place called Heaven did. He created the heavens and the earth. God existed before the angels, who were created in the opening moments of the first 24-hour day of creation. Since Satan is an angel, he did not pre-exist God or creation either. There is not a cosmic eternal battle between good and evil. Only God existed eternally in the past, in perfect fellowship with Christ and the Spirit, And Satan will be punished forever into the future with his angels and followers, in no position to offer resistance to God and His people.
- C. If you say that Jesus is created, or that He did not create everything that has been created, or that He is an angel, or that He had to compete for the place of Son of God, you have accepted beliefs that are defined as cultic. These believers depart from the true Christian faith.
 - D. Notice the various prepositions connected Christ and creation:
 1. All things were created BY Him.
 2. All things were created THROUGH Him.
 3. All things were created FOR Him.

These give an interesting nuance to Christ's creative work. He created. God created through Him. They were created for His benefit, to find their end and fulfillment in Him. Sounds like Romans 11:36!

III. Christ is the Sustainer of Everything, v. 17

- A. What is said above is strengthened by the two propositions in v. 17. First of all, Christ is before all things. He is not a "thing" as such. There is God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), and then there is everything in the universe. He cannot be before all things if He is a peer to Michael or Satan or all the angels or some such. He is before them ALL.
- B. Second, Christ is the "holder together" of all things. The verb means to cohere, continue, endure, exist, or hold together. It is used in 2 Peter 3:5 of the earth "holding together" out of the water by God's word (Gen. 1:9). Things continue to exist simply and only because of Christ. All churches, believers, atheists, evildoers, you, the earth itself, the solar system, and the entire universe, continue as they are because it is the pleasure of Christ that they do so.

Conclusion

Do homage to the Son (Psalm 2:12)! He is over all things—and you too.

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