

Text: Colossians 1:18-19

Title: Christ Above All, Part 2

Truth: Christ, the head of the church, has first place over all things.

Date/Location: July 26, 2015 at FBC

Introduction

Christ is above all (and the bold items are covered in these notes):

- 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.

IV. Christ is the head of the church, v. 18a

- A. Some have errantly suggested that “head” means “source,” as in “the head of the river.” But the word really means **authority over** and refers to the sovereignty of Christ over his body.
1. Although Christ *is* the source of the church (He is the **beginning**, after all), His being **head** refers to being in charge, the brains of the operation, the guide, the leader.
 2. Just like your head is “over” your body in terms of being in charge of it, so Christ is over His body. Eph. 1:22, Eph. 5:23, Col. 2:19. I am ignoring the exceptions which prove the rule, like involuntary muscle spasms. Because Christ makes people stewards over His church, there is a level of flexibility in how church is done and this can be misused. Sin in the church is like an out-of-control part of the body (or a cancer) doing things the head doesn’t desire for it to do.
- B. Practically, this truth should prevent leaders from running the church as if we own it (1 Peter 5:3). It should prevent us from running the church just like a business. It should prevent all of us from being driven by the question, “What do the people want?” and encourage us to ask, “What does the Lord Jesus want?” For example,
- “What worship do I like?” should be replaced with “What worship does Christ the Head of the Church desire?”
 - “What teaching do I want to hear?” should be replaced with “What teaching does Christ the Head of the church want me to hear?”

- “What kinds of ministries do I think we should have?” should be replaced with “What kind of ministries does Christ the Head of the church tell us to have?”
- “What kind of building do we want?” should be replaced with “What is the best use of our resources in terms of what Christ the Head of the church wants?”
- “How would I like to govern this church?” should be replaced with “How does Christ the Head wish us to govern ourselves?”
- These questions are just a corporate extension of the same concept applied to our individual lives. As Christ is the head of the church, so He is the Lord of our individual lives as well. So, “How do I want to run my family?” should be replaced with “How does Christ want me to run my family?” “What do I want to do with my life?” with “How does Christ want me to order my life?” and the like.

C. The body is defined as the church, not the Lord’s physical human body. This church is the universal entire church. The word does not refer to a single local church, nor is it a generic noun referring to any or every particular church. Of course a single local church is headed by Christ, by virtue of the fact that He is the head of the entire body of believers-- all true believers everywhere and at all times. Christ is the head of them as believing people, whether viewed as local churches at any particular time or place or as the entire church collected together as a whole.¹

D. Because God describes the church as a body, this should remind us that the local church is not an impersonal institution or machine; it is a body, a functioning whole organism. It is a living thing, a corporate being. It is a personal, inter-personal, inter-connected thing. It should remind you individually that you are part of something. You cannot look at “going to church” as just an *event* in your life. You *are* the church, and we all need each other serving by love, encouraging, ministering, etc. for the body to function as a non-handicapped entity.

V. Christ is the first glorified and resurrected One, v. 18b

A. Christ is the **beginning**. Christ was not simply a martyr, teacher or inspiration for the church; He is actually the origin of it, the builder (Matt. 16:18), the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).

¹ Contrary to http://kentbrandenburg.blogspot.com/2011/12/spirit-baptism-historic-baptist-view_23.html, footnote [vi]. Brandenburg is a strong advocate of a “local church only” Baptist view, and is very opposed to our “universal church” understanding.

B. Christ is the firstborn from the dead. The context is clear that the firstborn is used in the fifth sense from the notes on Colossians 1:15-17, namely:

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.

We can add that the term “firstborn” in this sense is related to “firstfruits” as in 1 Cor. 15:20, 23. Furthermore, firstborn speaks of priority in time and rank, which He obviously has because He is sitting at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33 and Phil. 2:9).

C. Along with all the other things we said in the prior message, His being the firstborn from the dead is the reason that we can say He is the preeminent one. He holds the highest rank; he has first place. He is head, and first to come back from the dead, so that we would see in Him the one who is FIRST. God raised Him up so that he would get the preeminence that He deserves, in our eyes and in the eyes of the world.

D. I put “glorified” in the title of this section because the Bible means a certain kind of resurrection when it says Christ is firstborn. The son of the widow of Nain, Lazarus, a young girl, Tabitha (Dorcas), and certain ones in the Old Testament ministries of Elijah and Elisha were raised from the dead to a natural body,² but only to die again. The resurrection we are talking about here is the complete transformation of a person from a natural body to what we call a glorified, sinless, everlasting body. While having similarities with our previous body, our new body will be much better and super-natural (1 Cor. 15:35-50).

VI. Christ is the One in Whom dwells all the fullness of God, v. 19

A. Most translations supply the words “God” or “the Father” as the subject of the sentence because the verb “pleased” is often used about God the Father when speaking about the Son.³ However, the text literally says that “all the fullness (subject) was pleased to dwell in him.”

B. Obviously **fullness** is the key term. It seems to be an indirect reference to God or the divine nature of God. The term itself lends the notion of the completeness or totality of divine attributes (Kent, *Treasures of Wisdom*).

² 1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4:35, 2 Kings 13:21, Luke 7:13-15, Matthew 9:25, John 11:43-44, Acts 9:36-42, Acts 20:9-12.

³ Matthew 3:17, 17:5, Mark 1:11, 9:7, Luke 3:22.

This is contrasted with the meaning of the same word from Gnostic and proto-gnostic belief where deity is a collection of emanations or aeons of various sorts. The “fullness” in that system is the combination of these emanations. Paul teaches that far from a gnostic system, Christian theology teaches that Christ Himself is home of all the fullness of divine attributes. There are no other beings or mediators that share this, such as angels. Finally, these attributes “dwell” in Christ permanently. He is the home of these attributes.

- C. As we said last week, there is no one more like God than Christ. With the Holy Spirit, the three-in-one God shares the fullness, the divine nature, completely.
- D. This fullness is personified as being “pleased” or “happy” to dwell in Christ. Despite how round-about this statement may seem, it is a strong statement of the unfiltered, undiluted deity of Christ.
- E. The same term **fullness** is used in a much more limited way of the church and individual believers. The body, the church, is the **fullness** of Christ (Eph. 1:23). The church must come to the measure of the fullness of Christ, which I take to mean the totality of what Christ wishes His church to be. Believers can be filled with the fullness of God and Christ (Eph. 3:19, John 1:16), partaking of the pure nature God gives to His people (2 Peter 1:4).
- F. Colossians 2:9 adds that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form. The “fullness” is to the sum total or full measure of deity.

Conclusion

The completeness of the divine nature resides in Jesus Christ. Further, God designed the program of salvation, the incarnation, and the death and resurrection of Christ, to bring Him honor as the first-place, highest ranking Being in or out of the Universe. John 5:19-29 explains that the God the Father and the Son work in harmony to accomplish the resurrection and judgment of the dead, and God has handed over the responsibility of judgment to the Son **so that people will honor Him as they honor the Father**. When people don’t ascribe honor to Christ, or to the Father, it ought to trouble the Christian’s soul.

The preeminence of Christ demands that our focus in Christian life and church ministry should be **Christ**, not programs, ministries, details, traditions, and the like.