

“CHRIST—THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION”

COLOSSIANS 1:15

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

One thing must be clear; whatever is stated in these verses “is genuinely Pauline,” whether he wrote the whole or part or adopted it from elsewhere; Paul takes ownership of this material and it is part of his letter.

But, why this profound Christological argument here at the beginning of the letter?

- Likely because Christ’s exclusive part in providing spiritual growth and security as well as his exclusive role in the universe at large was being questioned by the false teachers.
- The word **all** (every, each) occurs 8 times in vv. 15-20 and is the thread that binds the verses together.
- Moreover, the passage lends support to the statement just concluded concerning Christ’s redemptive work (12-14). The believer’s rescue and transfer is secure because of Who it is that has done the work—the One who is Creator and Lord of the entire universe!
- The passage in identifying Christ with the Father in His planning and control of the universe identifies Jesus as God as He is understood in Judaism.

Background of the Theological Material of 1:15-20

1. The Genesis Creation Account is a source of Paul’s material, especially in such ideas as “image of God” (Gen. 1:26-28), and possibly even with “beginning” and “firstborn.” This connection also supports the ideas found in Paul of “creation” and “new creation.” Also, Paul’s presentation of Christ in terms of the “first Adam” fits well with such a background.
2. OT messianic ideas also form the background of the teachings found here. Christ being at the center of both creation and redemption is in harmony with the OT pattern of teaching, and is reflected in some NT passages such as I Cor. 8:6 and Rom. 8:29—where we see both “image” and “firstborn.” This passage show us the reality of Christ as he was experienced in the early church.
3. Paul’s experience on the Damascus Road could have influenced his understanding of Christ as the image of God. As Paul later states in II Cor. 4:6, he saw “the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Paul is not simply echoing someone else’s form of words here; he is expressing what his own experience confirmed to be the truth.
4. Christians under the guidance of the risen Lord Himself and then as directed by the Holy Spirit continued to redefine OT Jewish teachings and ideas in harmony with OT Scripture.
5. Paul has been influenced by the combination of the “wisdom (sophia) figure [found in some OT texts such as Pr. 8:22-31, and in more developed form in Judaism] and the “word” (logos) figure more fully developed in Judaism and especially in Philo. Some Key Facts about the Passage:
 - 1) Already at this early stage, and even earlier if the words are adopted from a hymn, Christ was given divine honor in both Creation and Redemption and was worshiped.
 - 2) Paul’s insistence on Christ’s greatness made clear Christ’s ability to grant the things for which Paul has prayed in vv. 9-14.
 - 3) Christ is both the “firstborn” of all Creation (v. 15) and the “firstborn” from the dead (v. 18). Redemption and Creation are interrelated and both under His rule. As Hendricksen notes, “He who in answer to prayer grants assurance of salvation is also able in answer to prayer to grant rain!) (70). Christ having such power and control means that no one or nothing can possibly separate believers from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35, 38).
 - 4) The “notions of the errorists fade away into worthlessness” before such a powerful and all-sufficient Savior.
 - 5) Moreover, Christ’s redemptive activity is truly universe-embracing.

CHRIST IS ALL YOU NEED; DON’T LOOK BEYOND HIM!

I. CHRIST IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD (15a)

- Christ always has been, is, and always will be the image of God. His incarnation did not make him the image of God, but it did bring him as being that image within our grasp.
- Scripture teaches that man is made “in the image” of God; **Christ is the image of God.**

A. Likeness—He is all that God is in the fullness of His divine attributes.

B. Representation—“Image” implies an archetype of which it is a *copy*.

C. Manifestation—This idea comes from the contrast with “the invisible God.” Since Christ **is the image** of this invisible God (Jn. 1:18—no one has seen Him), He makes God known, and those who see Him have seen God (Jn. 14:9). As John states in chapter 1:1-18, the Word was with God and was God and then once incarnated (v. 14) has made God known (**v. 18—Read—“Only begotten God**). Only a visible God can be the image of God, possessing all the elements and attributes of His nature”.

Illus: **Someone attempting to convey to someone the image of his father with increasing accuracy by using consecutively a pencil outline, then a full sketch, then a painting, then a photograph then a statue, then an animated robot-like figure—but all “fall woefully short. However, “Jesus Christ is God in human flesh” and He has perfectly portrayed the Father.**

II. CHRIST IS THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION (15b)

A. Priority—Preexistence; everything else came through Him

B. Superiority—over all of creation—not a part of creation; a basic part of the meaning in many cases is the idea of pre-eminence over.

C. Firstborn was the heir—with special rights and privileges; Israel was God’s “firstborn.”

D. Ps. 89:27—Messiah is God’s “firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

E. In many cases, the idea of sovereignty in the word “firstborn” completely overshadows and replaces the idea of priority—so much so that as Lightfoot points out, a Jewish rabbi actually used the term of God himself; see also Job 18:13—firstborn of death, an “alarming and fatal malady”; Is. 14:30—firstborn of the poor”—“a pauper of paupers”

F. When we compare Him as the firstborn of the dead the emphasis is upon the fact that he is the cause of their resurrection; thus in the same way He is firstborn of creation because He is the cause of its existence.

G. Also, as noted above, Paul does not use the term “first-created” that was available if that were what he had intended.

H. Christ is the Father’s firstborn as His Chief Representative and acts in His Father’s name. What He does and says is the same as if the Father says or does it. As the “firstborn” of the universe He is its chief governor. He is “manifested Deity.”

CONCLUSION

“Now He is exalted to unbounded sovereignty as ‘Lord of all,’ rolling onwards the mighty and mysterious wheels of a universal providence, without halting or confusion; seated as His Father’s deputy on a throne of unbounded dominion, which to this world is its tribunal of judgment—wearing the name at which every knee bows...the acting President of the universe, and therefore ‘the First-born of every creature.’ His Father’s love to Him has given Him this pre-eminence, the ‘double portion,’ ‘Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee.’ It is plainly implied at the same time that He existed before all creatures” (p. 50).

Jesus Christ is both “the child born” and “the Son given,” and “He properly bears the character of the ‘Everlasting Father’ (Is. 9:6-7). Those who would deny the full deity of Christ must remember that “A Savior not quite God is a bridge broken at the farther end” (Thomas, 47).

ILLUS. Poem, the vain bridge that man builds. [Annie Johnson Flint]

CHRIST IS ALL YOU NEED; DON’T LOOK BEYOND HIM!