

“POWERFUL PREPOSITIONS DISPLAYING A POWERFUL SON”

COLOSSIANS 1:16-17

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INTRODUCTION

Here, Paul states some additional amazing truths about the Divine Son of God, and he does so primarily through the use of one of the most taken for granted and least appreciated parts of speech in the English language—the preposition. In our current passage Paul uses **four** different prepositions, and one of them twice—the first and last ones—in order to explain the power and significance of the Divine Son: “In, by/through, for, before, and in.”

In this passage we see that Christ is “The Creator of it All”, that He is before all, and that all things hold together in Him. **YOU MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THE POWERFUL SON OF GOD AND FALL DOWN BEFORE HIM IN AWE.**

- I. IN HIM ALL THINGS WERE CREATED [past completed action].
He is the sphere of all creation; all is created in reference to Him. All the laws and purposes which guide the creation and government of the universe reside in Him. He was its conditioning cause, its originating center, and its spiritual locality. The act of creation rested, as it were, in him.
 - A. In Heaven and on Earth—the **entire universe**
 - Note the emphasis upon ALL THINGS—4 times in 16-17.
 - *Classification is here is by Locations*. Heaven/Earth is not Equal to Invisible/Visible—some things in Heaven are visible [sun moon, stars, etc.]; some things in earth are invisible [souls, etc.]
 - The grammar forbids any evolutionary concept of origins. The permanence of the universe rests, then, on Christ far more than on gravity. It is a Christo-centric universe.
 - B. Visible and Invisible –Classification here is by essences.
 - C. Powerful spiritual beings
 1. Thrones
 2. Dominions
 3. Rulers
 4. Authorities
 - Paul gives no hard and fast list of these beings in the NT.
 - The order is often different or even reversed.
 - Likely fallen angels are prominently in view; but good angels cannot be excluded.
 - Though clearly spiritual beings are mainly in view, earthly rulers cannot be absolutely excluded.
 - The inclusive language of this verse suggests that Paul is asserting Christ’s supremacy over the entire angelic realm. The critical impact of angels on the affairs of human beings was a fundamental components of the ancient world view. This belief was apparently an important catalyst for the Colossian false teaching, and Paul’s emphasis here on Christ’s supremacy to these powers reminds the Colossians that they are utterly unable to rival Christ in any way.
 - Of course, the Bible also presents the angels, both righteous and fallen, as still very active and powerful in our world. Some, however, attempt to provide detailed relationships between the angels listed here and the earthly/human structures, persons, and institutions through whom evil ‘powers’ might be working today. There is no doubt that false religions, occult practices, and wicked political systems are led by wicked spiritual forces, but attempting to pair each term listed here with particular applications to such is a fruitless endeavor.
 - Eph. 1:21 gives a clue to Paul’s motive in using the expression “and every name that is named not only in this age but in the coming one.”
 - His point is that people are *reverencing* names or titles of dignities—whether such are real or imagined—as may be seen by comparing the words in Phil. 2:9—“a name that is above every name.”

- II. BY/THROUGH HIM ALL THINGS HAVE BEEN CREATED [past completed action with continuing results].
- Christ is the active agent of creation—in its design and fulfillment, every part of it.
 - No more creation now occurs—it “has been and remains so.”
 - Moo concludes that although we may concede that Paul’s teaching here has some connection with wisdom/word tradition, “the concept does not depend on that tradition. **Still less can we interpret the text as though its assertions about Christ as mediator of creation serve only to show that Christ is the ‘climactic manifestation’ of wisdom and imply nothing about his preexistence**” (124).
- III. FOR HIM ALL THINGS HAVE BEEN CREATED
- He is the goal of creation.
 - Every creature “must contribute glory to him and serve his purpose.
 - Those who willingly submit to Him serve, so to speak, as His **throne**; those who rebel against Him and are His enemies serve as His **footstool**.
 - Such a vision of Christ is so comprehensive that it reminds us that ‘for those who have been redeemed by Christ, the universe has no ultimate terrors; they know that their Redeemer is also creator, ruler, and goal of all.
 - In this epistle, Paul focuses on the exaltation of Christ and points out His entire sufficiency; angels, however exalted, are merely creatures of Christ and are subject to Him. In this passage Paul shows that “angels have no power apart from Christ. In fact, apart from him they cannot even exist. They are *creatures*, nothing more” (H. 73). Good angels cannot add anything to the fullness that believers have in Christ, and evil angels cannot separate believers from Christ (see Rom. 8:35-38). Paul later shows that through His death Christ has in reality already defeated these evil powers (2:15). The point is that Christians should not expect anything of significance in relation to their salvation from these lesser beings—from the angels, but they should expect everything from *him*, from him *alone*.
- IV. HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS. (17a)
- Primarily teaches **pre-existence of Christ**.
 - “He” is very emphatic.
 - “Is” in the present tense is also significant—not “was” or “will be.”
 - Compare Jn. 1:1; Phil. 2:6-7.
 - Some think that “before” may also indicate “rank” here; but that idea is not as probable.
- V. IN HIM ALL THINGS CONSIST/HOLD TOGETHER (17b)
- A. This statement shows the **present** work of the Savior—once creation is accomplished—Providence.
 - B. “In” may include here sphere and maybe also “agency/instrumentality.”
 - C. “Stand together” here has the idea of “continue, endure, exist, consist, and be composed.”
 - D. The perfect tense shows a continued state of completion and holding together.
- Because of Christ the world is not a chaos but a cosmos. It is an orderly universe, a *system*” despite appearances of everything being out of joint due to sin and judgment. What holds the universe together is not Chance or Fate or the laws of Nature. In Him all things consist—including atoms beneath us to which geology has not descended, and stars beyond us to which astronomy has never penetrate those secret forms of existence which the unaided eye cannot detect are receiving from Him “their meat in due season.”

CONCLUSION

CHRIST IS BOTH THE CREATOR AND THE SUSTAINER OF THE UNIVERSE. The Colossian believers need not look for anyone outside of Christ for complete fulfillment. “Things make sense only when Christ is kept at the center” (Moo).

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