

<b>Series:</b> Colossians	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Colossians 1:15-23</i>	<b>Title:</b> Prominent or Preeminent?	<b>Date:</b> 1.03.2021
<b>Website Writeup:</b> Continuing with the idea that we live what we 'know' to be true of Jesus, we explore further Paul's wonderful image of Christ in this passage and how that should affect our lives!			

Begin with Playing “[Jesus is My Friend by Sonseed](#)”

Kim & I were married on June 20<sup>th</sup> 1992. When I said ‘I do’ I didn’t fully know her. I knew she liked to be outside, gardening, rock climbing, hiking, reading & was a teacher. I knew her family & what they did. I knew she was beautiful & wouldn’t entertain marriage before one year of committed dating. I knew what made her mad, since I had a knack for bringing out her anger. I knew she was independent & what she felt about certain things & that she would at least be willing to go into cross-cultural missions. And, I was absolutely positive she had great taste in men.

I also knew my own expectations of what a wife should be. Back then my thoughts on the subject were dictated more on what others told me about marriage, than actual experience, or knowledge. Marriage was defined not only by my limited knowledge of Jesus, but also by the world around me. I came out on the tail end of a generation viewing marriage roles in very different ways. Quite confusing at times. Imagine my surprise when Kim didn’t fit all my preconceived notions. When I found out she had her own thoughts about what a wife should be. It’s always a risk at some level, you can’t fully know that future spouse standing there on your wedding day.

After almost 29 years I know a great deal more about Kim. Our relationship has deepened. The years & situations we’ve endured together have shown me a lot. They’ve revealed to me Kim’s deeper thoughts & how she reacts in various situations. I learned how tenacious she is, devoted & strong when I saw her in Indonesia. I had no idea how soft, loving, wise & intelligent she was until we had children. New aspects of Kim are still being rounded out to me as we face life together.

The Colossians had married Jesus, made a commitment to him. That came with preconceived notions as to who God is, or how spiritual life’s lived. They continually had notions voiced to them & residue from their host culture. There were, as we said last week, certain things being taught contrary to the true Jesus. What they needed to do was strip it all away allowing Jesus to speak for Himself. To listen to the Word of God. Just like me allowing Kim to speak through experience & word as my wife, the Colossians needed to listen to Jesus, allowing Him to define Himself. *Because, remember from last week, we live out of what we know to be true of Jesus. Paul continues to preach Truth with a capitol ‘T’ to the Colossians to clear up misunderstanding. One more step in their journey of faith with Him, knowing Him more fully, as it says later in chapter 2:2-3 – ‘My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart & united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom & knowledge.’*

We need to *know* the true Jesus. The question today is...is He just prominent or is He preeminent in my life? For the Colossians to know Jesus, Paul says seven things. These seven things should serve to show his preeminence in their lives.

Firstly, **He is the image of God:** If I put this Eagle up on the screen what does it represent to you? It represents freedom, strength, solidity, power, etc. It represents America. An iconic image of this country. If I put this up on the screen (*the Islamic icon*) what does it represent to you? For some this may be very negative, for others it may be very positive depending on your background. It's an iconic image of Islam. **What if I put this up (a cross) what do you think of?** Again, for some it may mean wonderful things, but for others it may mean negative things. An iconic image of Christianity. What about the Golden Arches? What about these lips?

Now, if we could have Jesus show up in the flesh today, what would he represent to us? Paul's saying He's the exact representation/eikon of God. He's not a cheap rip off (*like Luis Vitton bags in Asia*) but the manifestation of God to the world. The icon of God, the very representation & presence of God in His being.

Paul adds in Verse 15 '*He is the image of the invisible God.*' In 2 Corinthians 4:4 it says, '*The god of this age [referring to Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*'

Paul was a Jew, for him the Tabernacle/Temple displayed the glory of God. However now, for him, the glory resides in the person of Jesus Christ. The image of Christ represents & reveals what's hidden, making what's invisible, visible. It's not a copy & just like a mirror gives a reflection of an image, Jesus is the revelation of God the Father. Remember, Jesus says in John 14:9 '*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*' John 1:18 says Jesus 'exegetes' the Father to the world. He reveals God to us. Hebrews 1:3 says, '*The son is the radiance of God's glory & the exact representation of his being.*'

By saying all this Paul's fighting against the prevailing philosophies of high ethereal extra spiritual knowledge. He's making God accessible in the person of Jesus Christ. If you want to know God, know Jesus.

Secondly, he says He's ***the firstborn over all creation.*** We usually read the word '*firstborn*' as being in chronological order. Some have tried to say this term meant Jesus was a created being. In Psalm 89:27 King David was appointed as firstborn even though he was the youngest of eight brothers. In Exodus 4:22 God uses the term for Israel. It's a title of honor or position. In the Roman world it meant *an heir of an estate.* Jesus is preeminent over & preexisted before all things; the ultimate ruler of all things by this title. Heir of all creation!

Thirdly Verses 16-17 reveal **Jesus as Creator.** '*For by him all things were created: things in heaven & on earth, visible & invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him & for him. He is before all things, and in*

*him all things hold together.*' So far Paul's clearly portrayed Jesus as Image of God who has power over all things, there before the beginning. He's eating away at the wrong thinking seeping into, or residing in the thoughts of the Colossian church. Remember, we said last week, physical matter was considered evil in some philosophies, so the errant thought became, Jesus wasn't a physical being. Some thought Jesus to be only an angelic being, not God. Or, you needed some special spiritual knowledge to know God rightly. Or, you needed some sort of special knowledge of the stars to control the elemental spirits of the world, etc.

Paul pulls no punches, in his love for these people he reveals to them Christ was the Wisdom of God which created all things. The language used here reveals all physical powers of the world & all spiritual powers as well. But not only that, they were created by Him & specifically for Him as well. This did two things...1. For the Jewish believers it meant that this Creator God that you worship in the Torah, is the Wisdom of God that participated in Creation. Jesus is who the Hebrew Scriptures point to & needs to be worshiped as God. 2. For the Gentile believers it meant Christ was superior to all things & if you lived in fear of spirits before, or felt that you needed something special, it's all found in Christ. He's supreme over all things which should eradicate all your fears. You no longer have to follow created things, but the Creator!

Fourthly, he claims **Jesus as sustainer**. When I first moved to Indonesia Pak Soeharto was still in power in his 32<sup>nd</sup> year of reign as dictator. No one, up until that time, dared challenge him, or they met a horrible fate. Indonesia seemed to be held together by the person of Pak Harto, as they called him. But in that year, students started to challenge the status quo, and Soeharto fell from power & Indonesia fell apart. The economy went in the tank. As the dollar dropped in value, one day you could buy a car for 18k & the next it cost only 4k – the wealthy who had dollars were buying things up like crazy. But for poor Indonesians, the price of rice quadrupled. They fell deeper in need. This went on for years, I was sitting with my family in a hotel across from the presidential palace in Jakarta the morning tanks & military marched down the streets of Jakarta in a show of force. They were there to oust the president that had taken over from Soeharto. Stability was not there, it was a very hard time for Indonesians. In just a few short years they had gone through presidents like candy. The country had merely disintegrated.

Modern physicists & other scientists, are looking for the Unified Theory of Everything. Trying to find the thing which holds everything together. Stephen Hawking said, "*The eventual goal of Science is to provide a single theory that describes the whole universe.*" Paul stated it almost 2000 years ago to the Colossians, Jesus holds all things together, things do not disintegrate under his rule. Revelations 4 says it's for His pleasure that all this was created & exists. Hebrews 1:3 says He holds all things together by His powerful word.

We must remember in light of an election & pandemic Jesus is sovereign over all - there's no crisis in his eyes. The sustainer of all things. He's not at all surprised by what's happened. A perceivably horrible situation can actually be God doing something great

(Joseph sold into slavery). As a matter of fact, the economic & political instability in Indonesia made for an open road for the Gospel to go forth in many ways. What's God doing in America, I don't presume to know, but as His children, we should never live in fear even if we lose everything, we still have Him!

Fifthly, Paul says in v18, ***And he is the head of the body, the church.*** The Colossians may've lost sight of this. 'Head' speaks of that which is *the source & authority*. Without the head you have no direction or life, everything the Church does, and is, should flow out of Jesus & what He does. The head of this church is not me or the Pastoral Council, it's Jesus. Sometimes we lose sight of that taking us years to come back to center. Philosophies enter the Church which seem wise. Business practices enter the Church which seem practical. Bottom line, the church makes its decisions based on Jesus & our unique relationship to Him. Financial decisions aren't made on business principles, but on faith & love, growing out of trust in our 'head', Jesus. How we treat each other should flow out of Christ, we're servants. How we approach & interact with the outside world should reflect His love for them. Maybe we should get rid of the word 'leader' replacing it with 'servant' to remind ourselves of what we are. Our purpose, direction, vision & mission are guided by the Holy Spirit & tethered to the *Word*, who is Jesus.

Number 6...Paul says, ***He is the beginning & the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*** He's the beginning, He rules it. Christ created the church (Mt 16:18), He is the firstborn (*the supreme one*) and leads his church beyond death. As He's risen from the dead, so shall His Church.

And number 7...In v19 Paul says, ***For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...*** Remember, Jews would've remembered the Temple & God's residence there, especially when reading this. God's fullness dwelt in Christ, in other words all of what God is took up residence in this human, Jesus. Again, in Jesus words, if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father. In 2:9 Paul says, *'For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.'* Paul's breaking down arguments, replacing them with Jesus, because this phrase 'All His fullness' was a term familiar to the Gnostics which meant *the sum total of all divine power & attributes*. Paul uses this term eight times in this book to show Christ alone is all the fullness of God. No need to look elsewhere. There's no other special knowledge other than knowing Jesus.

These were seven truths about Christ given to the Colossians to counteract false philosophies. And now, Paul wraps up this argument in these next few verses by reminding them what this wonderfully powerful God of all things, Jesus, has done.

*20and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. 21Once you were alienated from God & were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish & free from accusation - 23if you continue in your faith, established & firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is*

*the gospel that you heard & that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

Notice, Paul's intentional use of phrases like '*all things*', continually tying Jesus' authority & reach over all aspects of creation, seen & unseen, to battle this Gnostic/Antinomian/Ascetic attitude which tended towards physicality, angels & special knowledge. The focus is to *reconcile himself*, the scope is *all things*, the result is *peace* & the means is through *the cross (his blood)*.

Scripture says, *by his wounds we are healed (Is 53:5)*. Romans 8 declares Jesus as the one who intercedes for us before the Father & that no one seeks God, all have turned away. It's God who pursues us. He loves enough to come after us when we were unable to help ourselves. We were aliens, foreigners, enemies in our minds, which led to evil acts in our lives. But He has reconciled our relationship to Himself. Reminding us of Temple sacrifices, He presents us free from blemish & accusation – in other words, because of Christ's actions on the cross we're brought before the Father & now all He sees is Christ's righteous record upon us.

As simple as the gospel is, it's hard to keep in perspective especially when you're bombarded with counter philosophies. The Gospel's contrary to human thought. No one gets anything for free. The concept of grace as found in Jesus is foreign, driving against our every nerve. America tells us to fight for our rights, jockey for position, gain value by accomplishment, wealth, education, association with important people. We're taught to guard our rights, to seek our place. Even when we marry up with Jesus we sometimes really don't believe it. Jesus reconciles us. God sees His righteous life when He looks on us now. *Paul uses the words 'established & firm' in this last verse. Maybe he's using the fact that Colosse was situated in an earthquake prone area. He's saying, stabilize yourself in the grace of Christ, root yourselves there & when everything else is shaking apart, you'll be fine.*

Sonseed called Jesus our friend. Over history people have tried to uncover the true Jesus. We have philosophers & theologians, the Jesus Seminar, Newsweek & Time Magazine on this search. Some see Him as a good teacher, a moral man, a political agitator, social reformer, a socialist or communist, a sage, an apocalyptic fanatic, or a Jewish peasant cynic. Some saw Him as the first Christian, more than the Christ. Kant saw Him more as a moral teacher making things better (sort of the moral Darwinian approach). Schweitzer saw Him as someone obsessed with end times. One man, John Dominic Crossan said we must add to the Gospels to find the true Jesus. He proposed 52 additional documents, one of which he created himself. Ghandi liked Jesus & said we were nothing like Him. The men on the road to Emmaus said He was a Prophet, great in word & deed. Jews were looking for a Davidic King. The Essenes were looking for two messiahs, kingly & priestly. And, Peter nailed it when he said, 'you are the Christ'.

I collect Jesus paraphernalia. We're not much different than the people of Jesus day, throughout history, or even the pop-culture around us at times. Some of what those outside the church say about Jesus is right as well as wrong, but the same is true many

times inside the church. We have these battles going on inside us as to what or who Jesus is.

Let me ask you a question, how do you know what you know is true, right, or good about God? The Church historically has *known* many things, been convinced of them from the Scriptures. Martin Luther comes along & challenges what the Church *knew* overturning the Christian World. And, now we could never see ourselves believing, or *knowing*, on the other side of his argument. Galileo comes along with his heliocentric/geocentric argument (explain). He was tried for something the Church '*knew*' that now we would laugh at. The Crusades, Christians convinced/*knowing* they were doing God's will to kill Muslims. Are you convinced, do you *know*, God would be happy for you to kill someone Jesus died for?

Apartheid was a theological construction. Christians *knew* it was right! Slavery in America was a theological construction, Christians *knew* it was right to subjugate & take away the names of Blacks in America. And when they got out of line, they were justified in punishing & killing them in the most brutal ways possible. The Southern Baptist convention was born on that issue & didn't renounce it until the mid 1990's. Who made up the Nazi party, Hindus, or Buddhists, or Muslims? No, Christians! They knew that it was right to kill Jews. The reason the Gospel's survived through all this is that there were many Christians who did not give up on the true Jesus. While others claiming to be of Christ, were just either operating out of a false image, or even worse, using Him to justify evil! Jesus said until heaven & earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. God preserves His Word despite what we do with it. You can't judge a belief system by its abusers. We can't denounce Christianity, rather we estimate individuals on their grasp & practice of it. Being aware, not everyone claiming to be of Christ is of Christ, nor is everyone on the same level of spiritual maturity.

We should be ware of what we know, because often times people have been very wrong. Paul talks about what we know in 1 Cor. 8 & 13 where he says, *'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.'*

And, *'If I have the gift of prophecy & can fathom all mysteries & all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.'* Maybe for once we need to be quiet & let Jesus speak.

I married Kim, knew what I was doing, but I grow in knowing her daily. We came to Jesus, we didn't fully understand Him, but we still need to grow in Him. He may have taken a place of prominence in our lives, but is He preeminent in all things? Remember, we live out of what we know to be true of Jesus.

**Orthopraxy is right practice – what are we doing with the message of Jesus? But we must remember orthodoxy, right belief, what we believe to be true of Jesus is equally important – it defines who we are & how we live, and directs our right practice.**