

The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ Jesus  
Colossians 1:15-23  
Key Verse: 1:18,19

"And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him."

In 1:1-14 we learned how God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is our Redeemer. In today's passage Paul emphasizes the supremacy of Christ Jesus. The Colossian believers were part of the Roman territory of Asia Minor. Though Rome ruled the world, she had inherited Hellenism, which consisted of Greek and Eastern cultures. Romans felt culturally inferior to Greeks, so they hired Greek tutors for their children. They also sent young men to Greece for education. So we call it Greco-Roman culture. The Colossians had been deeply immersed in this mixed culture. They were being inundated by its philosophies and mystery religions. When they first heard the gospel, they were happy and content. But as time passed, they felt the gospel was too simple compared to other religions and lacking something. Since their culture considered Christ just one of many, they were easily tempted to seek other gods in addition to Christ. We find a similar tendency in our times. Many people believe in Jesus, but in actuality, they do not see Christ reigning over every aspect of life. They feel that Christ reigns in their church, but not in their workplaces, homes, or schools. They think that a boss or professor is reigning. So their boss or professor can become like a god to them. But Paul proclaims that Christ Jesus is supreme in every aspect of our lives. When we acknowledge the supremacy of Christ Jesus, we can live and work before God, and not before the eyes of human beings. Then we can experience God's presence and God's blessing wherever we are and whatever we do.

Paul also emphasizes the sufficiency of Christ Jesus. In Christ, God dwelt in all his fullness. In Christ there is everything that we need. Sometimes we feel that something is missing. Christian life can seem to be boring. Other ideas can seem to be more satisfying. We need some kind of joy and shalom (which means "peace and harmony") and wisdom and healing to be happy and satisfied. How can we get these things? Many people experiment with eastern religions. Others seek pleasure through immorality, use drugs or indulge in technology. Many go shopping or become sports fanatics. Can we find true happiness through these things? Perhaps we can ask Mick Jagger, lead singer of the Rolling Stones. After indulging in all the pleasure of a totally corrupted life, he says, "I can't get no satisfaction." Is Christ Jesus all we need? Do we need something more than Jesus? Paul proclaims that we can find everything we need in Christ Jesus. Let's think about who Christ Jesus really is and what he means to us.

In Colossians Paul refers to Jesus most often as "Christ," or "Christ Jesus" (1:1,2,4,7,22,24,27,28,29; 2:2,5,6,8,9,10,11,13,17,20; 3:1,1,3,4,11,15, 16; 4:3,12), often as "Lord" (1:10,26; 2:6; 3:13,18,20,22,23; 3:24; 4:7, 17), and sometimes as "Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3), "Lord Christ" (3:24), "Lord Jesus" (3:17), or "the Son" (1:13,15). In this passage he says, "the Son."

First, the Son is the image of the invisible God (15a). The Son is the second person of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Although the word "Trinity" does not appear in the Bible, it expresses the Bible's teaching about who God is. The concept of the Trinity is so profound that we cannot grasp it with human reason. So Augustine said we should simply believe and accept it. In this passage Paul focuses on the relationship between the Father and the Son. Let's read verse 15a. "The Son is the image of the invisible God...." God is invisible to our eyes. So John 1:18a says, "No one has ever seen God...." Exodus teaches us that anyone who sees God will die (Ex 33:20). Psalm 104:2 says that God "wraps himself with light." In 1 Timothy Paul calls this "unapproachable light" (1 Ti 6:16). Just as we cannot look into the sun without being blinded, we cannot see God. Yet God has revealed himself through his Son, whom Paul calls his "image." The word "image" comes from the Greek "ikone," from which we derive the English word "icon." So we can say that Christ is the icon of the Father. We know about icons on our computers. They represent an invisible program that is dynamic and complex. When we click on them we can enter into the cyber world. Hebrews 1:3 says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...." But we should not limit Christ to our own concept of a representative. Philippians 2:6 tell us further that Jesus is in very nature God. His unchanging, essential being is that of God. John 1:1 proclaims, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Jesus is God. The Apostle Philip once said to Jesus, "Show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:8-9). The Apostle John, after having fellowship with Jesus for three years, said, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). God revealed himself as he truly is in Christ Jesus. Martin Luther said, "God made himself small in Jesus." God is not just something we imagine and dream about. God is real. This real and true God reveals himself through Jesus Christ. However, many people have their own concept of God. They draw from many religions and philosophies and make a god they like and can manage. This is no different than the idolatry of ancient times. God commanded us not to construct an image of him, even in our minds (Ex 20:4). When we want to know the true God, we must come to Jesus Christ. We can come to God only through Christ (Jn 14:6). Through Christ we can have fellowship with God and worship God.

Second, the Son is the agent of creation and sustains all things (15b-17). As we cannot know God without Christ, so we cannot understand creation without Christ. In verses 15b-17 Paul reveals this aspect of Christ's supremacy. Verse 15b calls Christ, "...the firstborn over all creation." Simply speaking, to call him, "firstborn," means that Jesus is preeminent, he was there first. We human beings make a big deal of being first. The first people who came to America claim the right to rule over those who came later. Yet in all creation, Jesus is first. It is because Jesus is the Eternal God who entered into time and space and became a man.

Verse 16 elaborates on Christ's role in creation. It says, "For in him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him." Nothing exists by chance. All things were created in Christ, through Christ and for Christ. All things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible originated from Christ. If we try to explain the things that exist without Christ, we are left with only a formless, empty void. Leonardo Da Vinci was a great mathematician, artist, thinker and inventor. He invested his great talents to find a unifying principle for creation apart from Christ. But he failed and was left with empty meaninglessness. He ended his life in despondency. Apart from Christ, we cannot find the answers to the fundamental questions of existence, such as "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" "Where am I going?" "Why am I here?" But when we know that through Christ all things were made, including ourselves, everything becomes clear. We can find meaning and purpose, order, and light for our lives. Christ is the exclusive agent of all creation. There is no secret territory that was not created through Christ. All things that exist--in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible--came into being through Christ. This includes all angelic beings (16b). Christ is supreme over all. There is no sphere free from his dominion. All things have been created through Christ. He is the Word through whom God created all things. All things have been created for Christ. The purpose of all creation is to bring glory to Christ.

Verse 17 reads, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Christ holds everything together and sustains all things by his powerful word (Heb 1:3). Christ did not just wind up the machine and set it in motion. He is intimately and continually involved in creation. He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground. He knows how many hairs we have on our heads. He is involved in creating every baby (Ps 139). Christ is active. Did all the works of creation stop when God rested on the seventh day? No. Jesus said that the Father was always at his work (Jn 5:17). Christ sustains all things. Everything depends on him for existence moment by moment.

Third, the Son is the head of the church (18-19). Verses 18-19 talk about the relationship between Christ and the church. Verse 18a says, "And he is the head of the body, the church..." Here, "the church" does not refer to a building or organization. It is not confined to a local congregation, but refers to the church universal, which includes all believers who confess Jesus as Lord--past, present and future. It includes Peter, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Billy Graham, Dr. Lee, Mother Theresa, and Mother Barry. Christ is head over us all. Paul's analogy of Christ as the head and the church as the body has deep meaning. First of all, it tells us that the church is a living organism. It is imbued with the life of God and is active and dynamic. Moreover, this analogy teaches us the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 1:22-23). A body and head are inseparable. They have a life relationship. All the directions and orders that govern the body come from the head. The head sustains the body. As the body moves according to the guidance of the head, so the church moves according to the guidance of Christ. Christ is the Ruler of the church. Usually people think of the church as a place to do good things--like help the needy, or enjoy fellowship, or receive some benefit. However, the church is where we have fellowship with Christ and his people, worship Christ, and find

Christ's direction and guidance. The church's mission is to reveal Christ and obey his will.

Verses 18b-19 explain in what ways Christ is the head of the church. Verse 18b says, "...he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." This verse tells us that Jesus' supremacy is based on his resurrection from the dead. There have been other people who rose from the dead, but Jesus' resurrection is different. Jesus is the first one to be raised in eternal victory over death. Jesus conquered death and cannot die again (Ro 6:9). Jesus said, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!" (Rev 1:18) In this way Jesus became supreme and preeminent as the head of the church. Christ is reigning in every realm. Paul emphasizes that Christ reigns over "all things" and "everything" again and again (16,16,17,17,18,20). Christ is not a dead hero or a late founder, but lives and reigns as Lord. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb 13:8). He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives! He lives! Let's encounter Jesus in every sphere of our lives: at home, at school, at work, at church. Jesus is there!

In the second place, Christ is the head of the church because he is sufficient. Verse 19 says, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...." Here Paul emphasized "all his fullness." This means that Jesus is the final, complete, perfect revelation of God. Jesus lacked nothing of God. This refuted the false teaching that Jesus was insufficient, that something else in addition to Jesus was needed. Paul proclaims that Jesus is sufficient for our salvation, for our spiritual growth, and for everything that we need. Jesus possesses all of God's attributes, such as wisdom, love, holiness, power, Spirit, glory, compassion, righteousness, justice, eternity. John 1:16 says, "From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another." We can receive fullness through Christ. We can be happy and satisfied with Jesus alone. We do not need anything other than Jesus. When we feel something is missing, where should we go? To the computer? To the department store? To hang out with friends? Sometimes, in seeking satisfaction, we sin, and suffer from guilt and despair. Let's accept that in Christ there is everything we need. Christ gives us inexpressible joy, peace that passes understanding, and life to the full (1 Pe 1:8; Php 4:7; Jn 10:10). Jesus said to the thirsty, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:13-14). Jesus said to the hungry, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry...." (Jn 6:35). Jesus said to those groping in darkness, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Jesus said to the weary and burdened, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). Let's come to Jesus.

Fourth, the Son is the Reconciler (20-23). In light of Christ's supremacy and his sufficiency, Paul explains what God has done through Christ. He has reconciled all creation to himself. Verse 20 says, "...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." When God created the heavens and the earth there was perfect order and harmony in the relationships between God and human beings, among human beings, and between human beings and creation. It was perfect paradise, where there was no hint of disharmony, disorder or confusion. Human beings could enjoy endless joy, prosperity,

blessings and freedom. But when man disobeyed God's command the harmony and order were broken. All peace and joy and happiness fled. Since sin entered man's heart, it broke all the relationships between God and human beings, among human beings, and between human beings and creation. Because of sin human beings became God's enemy and the object of his wrath. Because of sin human beings do not understand each other and do not love one another. Instead, they envy each other, and hate each other and fight each other. They hurt each other and get revenge. Sometimes the world seems so broken that it cannot be fixed. Actually, no one can fix it. But God can fix it. In order to fix all these broken relationships and the broken world, one thing was needed: blood, which means life-sacrifice. God sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ to this world. Jesus gave his life, shedding his blood on the cross. It was not just ordinary blood, but the blood of the sinless Son of God. This blood has the power to fix all the broken relationships and the broken world. This is the power of the blood. Only the power of Jesus' blood can bring true peace between God and human beings and all creation. This power is working in our world now. It will ultimately reconcile all things, in heaven and on earth.

In verses 21-22 Paul specifically mentions the reconciliation of the Colossians. Like the Colossians, we were also alienated from God and his enemies because of our evil behavior. But now by Christ's death on the cross, we are reconciled to God. The purpose of reconciliation is to be holy in his sight. This is amazing for us. At the last day of God's judgment, we can stand before God without blemish and free from accusation. We were sinners, full of weakness, mistakes, and blemishes. Sometimes we did something good, but our good behavior could not cover our sins. How could we stand before the judgment seat of Christ? Only when we depend on the blood of Jesus is it possible. It is possible when we continue in our faith, holding on to the hope held out in the gospel (23). The blood of Jesus can take away all our transgressions and cleanse us from all our sins. This is the gospel. This gospel is proclaimed to every creature under heaven. Paul had become the servant of this gospel. Like Paul, we also have become the servants of this gospel. Thank you, Jesus.

In this lesson we have learned who Jesus is. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Jesus is the Agent of creation. Jesus is Sustainer of all things. Jesus is the Head of the church. Jesus is the Reconciler. Jesus is supreme over all things and sufficient to meet our needs. In a word, Jesus is everything. We find everything we need in Jesus. We can be satisfied in Jesus alone. Let's come to Jesus, encounter Jesus, and live in Jesus in every area of our lives.