

Study of Colossians – Colossians 1:15-23 Bellevue Church of Christ – Fall 2013

I. The Scope of Christ's Supremacy (15-18)

(A) Image of God

-2Co 4:4-6

-An exact imprint of the Father (Heb 1:3)

-The incarnation of the Father (John 1:14, Phil 2:6-7)

-The manifestation of the Father (John 1:18, 14:9)

-Transforms us into the image of the Father, as man was meant to be (Gen 1:27; 2Co 3:18)

-Paul is directly confronting the challenge to Christ's deity.

-As the Creator of all things, how could he be anything less?

-He created things in "heaven" / "invisible" (Angels, Col 2:18-19)

II. The Basis of Christ's Supremacy (19-23)

(A) Fullness of God

Since God is completely present in Christ (2:9), Christ is both complete and sufficient for the Colossians.

(B) Reconcile All Things

-The blood of Christ removes the sin (v.22) of those who put faith in Him (v.23), bringing reconciliation and peace with God (vv.20&22).

-Rom 5:1-5

-Eph 2:13-18

Paul picks up from his mention of the Son at the close of the prayer in v. 14. He is addressing the most dangerous aspect of the heresy being taught at Colosae

15 **He** is the *image of the invisible God*, the *firstborn of all creation*.

16 For by *him* all things were created, in *heaven* and on earth, *visible and invisible*, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created *through him* and for *him*.

17 And he is *before all things*, and in him all things hold together.

18 And he is the *head of the body*, the *church*. He is *the beginning*, the *firstborn from the dead*, that in everything *he might be preeminent*.

19 **For** in him *all the fullness of God* was pleased to dwell,

20 and through him to *reconcile to himself all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making *peace* by the *blood of his cross*.

21 And you, who once were *alienated* and *hostile in mind, doing evil deeds*,

22 he has now reconciled *in his body of flesh* by his death, in order to present you *holy and blameless and above reproach* before him,

23 if indeed you *continue in the faith*, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Christologies of Paul

-Col 2:9-15

-Eph 1:20-23

-Phil 2:5-11

(B) Firstborn of Creation

-πρωτότοκος (prōtotokos)

-Pertaining to the inheritance rights of the firstborn

-Rom 8:29 "firstborn among many brothers"

-v.18 "the beginning... firstborn from the dead"

-Does NOT mean that Jesus was a created being (John 1:1-3)

-Another way to express the supremacy of Christ

-Compare to "Only Begotten" / μονογενής (monoγενēs)- John 3:16

(C) Head of the Body

-Eph 1:22; 4:4-16; 5:23

-Col 2:19

-Church = ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia)- the people of God who assemble

Their Former State

1. Alienated from Christ
2. Hostile in mind
3. Doing evil deeds

Body of Flesh

Perhaps addressing early Gnostic influences that threaten the faith of the Colossians

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Christologies of Paul

Colossians 2:9–15 (ESV)

⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Ephesians 1:20–23 (ESV)

²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Philippians 2:5–11 (ESV)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus as the Image of God

In regard to deity, Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (cf. 2 Cor 4:4). In interpreting this statement, we must not understand the apostle to be teaching that Christ is the image of God in a material or physical sense. The true meaning must be sought on a level deeper than this. Nor should we limit the concept to one stage or period of Christ’s existence. Some interpreters think Paul’s primary reference is to the preincarnate Christ, and the statements of vv. 15b, 16, which speak of Christ’s relation to creation, do lend some support to this view. Others prefer to think the apostle had in mind the incarnate Christ in his glorified state. Peake, a proponent of this view, says the passage assumes the preexistence of the Son, but its assertions are of the exalted Christ (p. 502). In view of the uncertainty of the matter, it seems best not to limit the concept at all. 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” (Nicholson, p. 75).

Eikōn, the Greek word for “image,” expresses two ideas. One is likeness, a thought brought out in some of the versions (e.g., Moff., Am. Trans., Wms., and Knox). Christ is the image of God in the sense that he is the exact likeness of God, like the image on a coin or the reflection in a mirror (cf. Heb 1:3). The other idea in the word is *manifestation*. That is, Christ is the image of God in the sense that the nature and being of God are perfectly revealed in him (cf. John 1:18).

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Therefore Paul can boldly say that we have “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6) and that believers, reflecting the Lord’s glory, “are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor 3:18). Paul’s statement leaves no place for the vague emanations and shadowy abstractions so prominent in the gnostic system.¹

The phrase “image of God” means that humans are created *as* God’s image—or, as His imagers. The image of God language in the NT brings this into focus: Jesus is described as God’s imager, and believers are to image Christ.

Two passages refer to Jesus as the image of God: 2 Cor 4:4 and Col 1:15. These passages speak of the incarnation of Christ—the eternal God becoming a human being. Having been “born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7; compare Phil 2:1–11), Jesus made God—through the incarnation—accessible to our human senses. He accomplished the plan of redemption on the cross, and offers salvation to humanity.

The language, however, suggests more. Paul writes that believers are destined to be conformed to the image of God’s son, Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29). This language is a call to act as Jesus would—to live like him. Acting like Jesus points to the functional idea of the image of God; it suggests we think of the image of God as a verbal idea. By “imaging God,” we work, serve, and behave the way God would if He were physically present in the world. In Jesus, God *was* physically present. Thus, we are to imitate—or, image—Christ.

God wants all humans to believe in Christ and be conformed to the image of Jesus. As Jesus imaged God, so must we image Jesus. In so doing, we fulfill the rationale for our creation: we image God. This process is a gradual one: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). In this passage, being filled with the Spirit is linked to imaging Christ—the ultimate fulfillment of our status as God’s imagers. One day, our imaging of Christ will transcend our life on earth. As Paul says in 1 Cor 15:49, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

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2 Corinthians 4:4–6 (ESV)

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

¹ Vaughan, C. (1981). Colossians. (F. E. Gaebelin, Ed.) *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

² Barry, J. D., Grigoni, M. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

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John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Philippians 2:6–7 (ESV)

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

John 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

John 14:9 (ESV)

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Firstborn of Creation

4758 πρωτότοκος (*prōtotokos*), ον (*on*): adj.; ≡ DBLHebr 1147; Str 4416; TDNT 6.871—**1.** LN 10.43 **birthright**, pertaining to the inheritance rights of the firstborn (Lk 2:7; Ro 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; 11:28; 12:23; Rev 1:5+; Mt 1:25 v.r.; Rev 2:8 v.r. NA26); **2.** LN 13.79 **existing before** (Col 1:15); **3.** LN 87.47 **superior** (Col 1:15), for another interp, see above, note: there may be overlap in the verses and entries³

Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

John 1:1–3 (ESV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 3:16 (NASB95)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

³ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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3666 μονογενής (*monogenēs*), ἐς (*es*): adj.; ≡ Str 3439; TDNT 4.737—LN 58.52 **unique**, only, one and only, *i.e.*, one of a kind: (many versions) only begotten (Lk 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; Heb 11:17; 1Jn 4:9+; Jn 1:34 v.r.)⁴

Created by Him

Colossians 2:18–19 (ESV)

¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Head of the Body / Church

Ephesians 1:22 (ESV)

²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

Ephesians 4:4–16 (ESV)

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 5:23 (ESV)

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Colossians 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

⁴ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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1711 ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), ας (*as*), ἡ (*hē*): n.fem.; ≡ DBLHebr 7736; Str 1577; TDNT 3.501—**1.** LN 11.32 **congregation**, an individual assembly of Christians (or OT believers Ac 7:38; Heb 2:12), usually with leaders who conform to a standard, and have worship practices, with members interacting, more or less local (Mt 18:17; 1Ti 3:5; 1Co 11:16–22; Jas 5:14; Rev 1:4; 1Pe 5:13 v.r.); **2.** LN 11.33 **church**, the totality of all congregations of Christians at all times (Mt 16:18); **3.** LN 11.78 **assembly**, gathering of persons for a purpose, even riotous (Ac 19:32, 39, 40)⁵

Definition **Any public assembly or gathering of people in a political, religious, or informal sense.**

English Translation

church
assembly
congregation

Versions

LEB; NASB; NIV; NLT; ESV; KJV; NRSV
LEB; NASB; NIV; NLT; ESV; KJV
LEB; ESV; NASB; NRSV

New Testament Occurrences

Gospels	3
Acts	23
Paul’s Letters	62
General Letters	6
Revelation	20
Total NT Uses	114

Ekklēsia (“assembly”) was the term applied to many types of public gatherings in the ancient Roman world, whether civil or religious. In Scripture, *ekklēsia* can refer both to assemblies of people in a nonreligious setting and to organized gatherings of the followers of Christ. For example, *ekklēsia* was used to designate a confused mob opposed to Paul’s message in Ephesus (Acts 19:32, 41). The same term was used to describe a regularly constituted legal assembly of the city (Acts 19:39). Elsewhere in Acts the word is used in the sense of “the people of God” or “the church,” both universally (e.g., Acts 8:3; 9:31) and locally (e.g., Acts 5:11; 8:1). *Ekklēsia* is also used to refer to the covenant people of God in the Old Testament, the assembly in the desert at the giving of the law (Acts 7:38).

Elsewhere in the New Testament, *ekklēsia* refers to either a local church or the universal church. For example, Matthew 18:17 states that the third step of church discipline is to tell the matter “to the *ekklēsia*.” This likely refers to a local assembly of believers. The universal sense is most fully developed in the letter to the Ephesians (e.g., Eph 1:22; 5:23).

In Matthew, Jesus announced that His mission was to build His *ekklēsia* (Matt 16:18). Here the term has the sense of a new community of followers, a new people of God that are united based on Jesus’ teaching and work. The same passage, regarding the *ekklēsia*, recounts that Jesus told Peter He will give him the keys of the kingdom of God, suggesting a significant connection between the kingdom of God and the Church. Therefore, in various ways, but not all, *ekklēsia* is an expression of the kingdom (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2).

For Paul, *ekklēsia* did not always comprise the people gathered together in one locale. This is apparent when he states, “So if the whole *ekklēsia* comes together ...” (1 Cor 14:23),

⁵ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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confirming the church was not bound to a specific physical space.

The sense of *ekklēsia* as a unified family of people bound by their relationship to Christ is suggested when Paul admonishes the un-brotherly love exhibited by the rich towards the poor when the Corinthians gathered for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:22). The lack of compassion was antithetical to the idea that *ekklēsia* represented a coherent family of God. *Ekklēsia* has a familial connotation elsewhere when Paul draws a parallel between a man's lack of ability to manage his personal home as a disqualification to serve as an elder managing the *ekklēsia* of God (1 Tim 3:5).

While *ekklēsia* in its basic sense refers simply to any public assembly, the NT usage emphasizes the *ekklēsia* of believers as a community united by their common faith in Christ.

DAVID SEAL⁶

Fullness of God

Colossians 2:8–10 (ESV)

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Reconcile all Things

Romans 5:1–5 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Ephesians 2:13–18 (ESV)

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

⁶ Barry, J. D., Grigoni, M. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.