

COLOSSIANS: CHRIST OVER ALL AND IN ALL (study 2)

Over all

Christ ... who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

ROM.9:4 (NASB)

Study 2a: CHRIST'S PRE-EMINENCE (1:15-19)

1:15 What is the force of *firstborn* in this context? (Psalm 89:27)

1:15 The main ideas then which the word involves are twofold; the one more directly connected with the Alexandrian conception of the Logos, the other more nearly allied to the Palestinian conception of the Messiah. *Priority* to all creation. In other words it declares the absolute pre-existence of the Son. At first sight it might seem that Christ is here regarded as one, though the earliest, of created beings. This interpretation however is not required by the expression itself. The fathers of the fourth century rightly called attention to the fact that the Apostle writes not [*protoktistos*], but [*prototokos*] In its Messianic reference this secondary idea of sovereignty predominated in the word [*prototokos*], so that from this point of view [*prototokos pases ktiseos*] would mean 'Sovereign Lord over all creation by virtue of primogeniture.' [Lightfoot 146,147]

1:15 Within the NT "firstborn" ... which occurs in the plural at Hebrews 11:28 and 12:23, always refers in the singular to Jesus Christ. In most of these contexts while priority of time is in view (Rom. 8:29; cf. the parallel or priority of rank tends to dominate. The title "firstborn," used of Christ here and in verse 18, echoes the wording of Psalm 89:27, where God says of the Davidic king: "I also will make him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." [O'Brien 44]

1:15 The great fathomless, shoreless ocean of the Divine nature is like a "closed sea" -- Christ is the broad river which brings its waters to men, and "everything liveth whithersoever the river cometh." [Maclaren 209]

1:16,17 In addition to Christ's *priority*, what else do we glimpse of His glory?

1:17 Away, then, with those Gnostic angelic emanations from the Godhead, which were regarded as only *more or less divine*, and which, for that especial reason, were held to be the only fitting links of intercourse between God and the universe. [Nicholson 70]

1:17 The imperfect [*en*] might have sufficed (comp. Joh i.1), but the present [*estin*] declares that this pre-existence is absolute existence. [Lightfoot 155]

1:17 He is the sustainer of the universe and the unifying principle of its life. Apart from his *continuous* sustaining activity (note the perfect tense [*sunesteken*]) all would disintegrate. [O'Brien 47]

1:17 [This passage] ... connects the remotest aeon of the past with Him. It connects the remotest star detected by the photographic plate with Him. It bids us,

when we feel as if lost in the enormity of space and time, fall back upon the Centre of both -- for that centre is our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us. [Moule 80,81]

1:18,19 How does the Greek term *pleroma* determine whether Christ's pre-eminence is relative? (2:9; Heb.2:7-9)

1:18 Not merely the Governmental head, "head over all things to the Church" (Eph. i. 22), but the *vital* head as well, since that of which He is the Head is His body, which, "by joints and bands having nourishments ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. ii. 19). ... the seat of its life, the source of its activity, the center of its unity, the inspiring, ruling, guiding, sustaining power of its spiritual being and blessedness. [Nicholson 81]

1:18 The familiar word "Church" deserves careful study both here and in the companion Epistle to the Ephesians, because the reference is to a spiritual organism, not an ecclesiastical organisation. ... it is impossible to avoid noticing the sad and solemn contrast with the only other place where the word "pre-eminence" is to be found (3 John v. 9). Those who love to have the pre-eminence cannot possibly recognise the pre-eminence of Christ. [Thomas 45,47]

1:18 The term [*ecclesia*, church], then, in the Greek and Jewish world prior to Paul meant an assembly or gathering of people, it did not designate an "organization" or "society." [O'Brien 58]

1:18 It is probably from this conception of the church as the body of Christ that we can best understand how Paul can speak of the believers as being "in Christ" and at the same time of Christ as being in them. For they are "in Christ" as members of His body, "baptized into Christ" (Gal 3:27). [Bruce 205]

1:19 Evidently this word (*pleroma*) had already received a definite theological import, and was in common use among the philosophical religionists. As a matter of fact, we know that the Gnostic teachers did use it, and that they meant by it the absolute perfection of Deity. [Nicholson 91]

"... the reference is to a spiritual organism, not an ecclesiastical organisation."

No elite in Christ's church, no special members in His body

The Gnostic spoke of a blind faith for the many, of a higher [*gnosis*] for the few. St Paul declares that the fullest wisdom is offered to all alike. [Lightfoot 170]

And this is his longing not for a few, for an inner circle, for such as might elect to follow "counsels of perfection" while the rest might be allowed to walk contentedly on a lower level. He is spending his soul upon the effort to get this holiness developed in "every man," "every man," again with urgent emphasis. It may be, as Lightfoot thinks, that he is here contrasting his aim with that of the Gnostic teacher, who avowedly aimed at the illumination (so he thought it to be) of only an esoteric circle. But anyway this *is* St Paul's urgent, we may almost say passionate aim -- the unreserved and instructed obedience, the adult holiness of every individual, man and woman ... that has come to Christ. In this sense, to him, there is no esoteric circle; or rather, the whole circle is esoteric. [Moule 112,113]

1:19 ... in language akin to [*pleroma*] the Old Testament recognizes that God himself (or his glory) fills the whole universe; so Jeremiah 23:24, "Do I not fill [*plero*] heaven and earth" (cf. Isa 6:3; Ezek 43:5; 44:4, where the cognate [*plerotheresetai*] occurs). [O'Brien 52]

Study 2b: RECONCILED BY & IN CHRIST'S BODY (1:20-29)

1:20-22 What heresy is Paul undermining by his emphases? (1 Cor.15:12; 1 John 1:1)

1:20 The false teachers aimed at effecting a partial reconciliation between God and man through the interposition of angelic mediator. The Apostle speaks of an absolute and complete reconciliation of universal nature to God, effected through the mediation of the Incarnate Word. Their mediators were neither human nor divine. The true mediator must be both human and divine. It was necessary that in Him all the plenitude of the Godhead should dwell. [Lightfoot 159]

1:22 The whole phrase makes plain that the reconciliation of the Colossians was accomplished by one who was truly incarnate (against a docetic understanding of Jesus' historical life) and who really died [O'Brien 68]

1:23 Is Paul inferring that Christ's death has not *completely* reconciled us – that now WE must do the rest? (Phil.3:8-15; 2 Cor.13:5)

1:23 If the Bible teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it also teaches that the saints are those who finally persevere -- in Christ. continuance is the test of reality. [Bruce 213]



Alexander
Maclaren

1:23 The moment's act of faith will bring the moment's blessings; but to-morrow will have to get its own grace by its own faith. We cannot lay up a stock for the future. There must be present drinking for present thirst; we cannot lay in a reserve of the water of life, as a camel can drink at a draught enough for a long desert march. The Rock follows us all through the wilderness, but we have to fill our pitchers day by day. Many Christians seem to think that their Christian character is stunted, and their growth stopped, and many a blemish visible, and many a "blame" to be brought against them. Nothing but continual exercise of faith, day by day, temptation, will secure the continual entrance into our weakness of the strength which makes strong and the purity which makes pure. [Maclaren 217]

1:24-27 What is the *mystery* that is the central theme of Paul's gospel (Rom.16:25; 1 Cor.2:1,7; Eph.1:9; 3:3,4,5,9; 5:32; 6:19; John 14:16-23)

1:27 Our expectation of that indescribable future is not as if we only "saw it afar off" and "embraced it," with wistful longings, across and intervening void. We are in vital contact with it already ... "Our sacred books in the East contain many noble precepts. Your sacred Book contains not only the precepts, but the secret how to do them." So said a young Japanese student to me at Cambridge, many years ago, on the eve of a wonderful discovery of the glory of Christ. It is even thus. The "secret how to do" is in our sacred Book; and it is -- CHRIST in you; WHOM we preach." [Moule 106,111]

1:28,29 Paul's proclamation of Christ involves what, in addition to pardon for sin? (2 Cor.5:14-21 -- what else does reconciliation involve beyond justification/forgiveness?)

1:27,28 Christ Himself, the Head of this Body, is the apostle's theme. Note his words, "whom we preach." To substitute *what* for *whom* we preach is a serious mistake. Christianity is centered in a Person, and no one preaches the gospel who does not preach Christ.... False teachers would turn the eyes of the saints away from Christ, the glorified Head of the Body, in order that they might occupy them with specious systems of Satanic origin, and thus draw away disciples after themselves, as Paul had warned the Ephesian elders. But all true Spirit-given ministry in Christo-centric. Every faithful minister of the new dispensation would lift up the Lord Jesus before the admiring gaze of His people so that, occupied with Him, they might be transfigured into His likeness. Like John the Baptist he will say, "He must increase, but I must decrease." [Ironside 59,60]

1:28 The theme of Christianity is not a theory, not a set of rules, not simply a code of morals, not even a system of truth, but a living Person and all these in Him. It is the peculiar characteristic of the religion of Christ that we cannot take the message and put aside the Speaker of the message. There are great teachers in the world, like Confucius, Socrates, Buddha, Mohammed, in whose writings may be found many truths, but those truths can be enjoyed without any reference to the person who uttered them. [Thomas 60]

If salvation is assured, why the "ifs"?

The "if" with which the 23rd verse begins has been the occasion of much perplexity to timid souls who hardly dare to accept the truth of the believer's eternal security, so conscious are they of their own weakness and insufficiency. But, rightly understood, there is nothing here to disturb any sincere believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are a number of similar "ifs" in the New Testament, and all with precisely the same object in view -- the testing of profession. In 1 Cor. 15:1,2 we read, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, *if* ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." Here the "if" is inserted in order to exercise the consciences of any who, having professed to believe the gospel, are in danger of forgetting the message, so proving that they have never really received the truth into their hearts. He would have them carefully examine their foundations. Many there are who readily profess to adopt Christianity and unite themselves outwardly with the people of God, who have never truly turned to

the Lord in repentance and rested their souls upon His finished work. Such endure for a time, but soon forget the claims of the gospel when Satanic allurements would draw them away. [Ironside 53,54]



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