



**April 14, 2024**

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**Colossians 1:15-23**

**"The Uniqueness of Christ"**

### **SUMMARY**

This passage likely reflects an early Christian hymn or confession of faith that has been incorporated into the letter. If the Colossians already knew these words, the Christ hymn reiterates the centrality of their faith in Christ while also continuing to proclaim an identity that is theirs in the crucified and risen Christ.

The immediate context of the hymn is important to note, for a key theme of the letter precedes the hymn: "He [God] has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (1:13-14).

The first stanza of the hymn (1:15-18a) proclaims the lordship of Christ, who is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." All realms and powers of the universe are subject to his lordship: "in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him." Christ is "before all things, and in him all things hold together." Christ's lordship is concretely present in the world and in the gathering of God's people within the Christian community. Christ himself is "the head of the body, the church."

The second stanza of the hymn (1:18b-20) proclaims the lordship of Christ who is "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." In Christ "the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." In Christ "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven." The centrality of his death and resurrection proclaims that Christ has made peace in all realms of the universe "through the blood of his cross." The sign of Christ's lordship in the world is centred in the cross and resurrection.

The verses that follow and flow from the hymn (1:21-23) draw the hearer into the life that is present in Christ. Those "who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds" are "now reconciled in his fleshly body through death." This reconciliation is expressed in sacrificial language: "to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him." Words of exhortation proclaim the truth of these words: "provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven." All this is under the encompassing lordship of Christ, of which Paul "became a servant of this gospel."

## QUOTES/THOUGHTS FROM THE SERMON:

In the translation as I present it, I have highlighted other poetic features. I have italicized all, which occurs a total of eight times. There is a ninth time if you include 1:20c: "whether those on earth or those in heaven." As we will see later on, the hymn sings of the universal lordship and absolute primacy of Jesus Christ overall. No creature is excluded from his power.

### A. TRANSLATION AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

15a . . . Who is the image of the invisible God,  
15b the firstborn of *all* creation.  
16a For **in him** were created all things  
16b in heaven and on earth,  
16c the visible and the invisible,  
16d whether thrones or dominions  
16e whether principalities or powers;  
16f *all* things were created **through him** and **for him**.  
17a And he is before *all* things,  
17b and *all* things **in him** hold together.  
18a And he is the head of the body, the church.  
18b Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,  
18c that in *all* things he himself might be preeminent.  
19 For **in him** *all* the fullness was pleased to dwell,  
20a and **through him** to reconcile *all* things **for him**,  
20b making peace through the blood of his cross, **through him**,  
20c whether those on earth or those in heaven (*italics mine*, NAB adapted).  
—Robert J. Karris "A *Symphony of New Testament Hymns*"

## QUESTIONS

Read Colossians 1:15-23. What immediately stands out to you? Does anything in this passage particularly confuse you, encourage you or convict you?

How would you answer someone who genuinely asked, "who is Jesus"?

As the 'image of God,' Jesus is God's exact representation (cf Heb 1:3). What God is, Jesus is. What God contains; Jesus contains. What God has; Jesus has. What God does, Jesus does. In every way that God is God, Jesus' being exactly (fully/perfectly) represents God's being. How does Jesus' own teaching in John 5:16-23, 26; 8:49-59; 12:49-50; 16:25-28; 17:20-24 back that claim up?

What evidence of Christ's deity do you see in the Gospel records of his life? How would you describe the relationship between Jesus and God the Father?

How does seeing Christ as the creator and sustainer (v16-17) help us fully understand the incredible humility of Jesus in his incarnation and crucifixion (Philippians 2:6-8)?

Jesus as the head of the church is a theology we strongly hold to and maintain. So how should Jesus' headship of The Church work out practically in the context of a local church?

These verses deal so clearly with the absolute supremacy of Jesus. Why do you think the supremacy of Jesus is such an important theme throughout the New Testament? As you consider the above questions and verses, do you think that your view of Jesus is full and complete? What is the result in our thoughts, priorities, behaviors, and relationships when we follow Christ as the pre-eminent very image of God? What forms of false teaching does Colossians 1:15-20 safeguard against?

How do you understand what Paul is teaching when he writes that we will be presented without blemish and free from accusation 'if' we continue in our faith?

## CLOSE IN PRAYER

Consider using "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." as the basis of your prayer.