

The High Christology Of Colossians

Christ is Preeminent

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Given 10-Aug-19; Sermon #1501

I think God wanted us to learn about Jesus Christ today because that is what my sermon is all about.

In my previous sermon on the Colossian heresy, in which I tried to show a link between the Colossian heresy, and the Laodicean apathy toward godly works, I mentioned almost in passing that the apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, presents what is called "a high Christology." I provided a hasty definition of high Christology on my way to making another point. But I think it is important that I expand that out somewhat in this sermon, because it is vital to our understanding. Our understanding both of Christ and His position now, and even in the future, of course, and our own position in relationship to Him. If we do not have the right understanding of Him, we are not going to be able to respond to Him properly.

The word Christology is easily broken down into its two component parts: Christ and ology. Put them together and you have Christology. You would think they would pronounce it *Christology*, and some do, but we will just go with the first one in *Webster's Dictionary*, which was *cristology*. Therefore, putting those two parts together, the basic meaning of Christology is "the study of Christ." Very easy. Or you could say the "study of Messiah," which is what Christ essentially translates from Hebrew to Greek.

Now, Christology is a scholarly pursuit of the Bible's presentation of Jesus Christ and His work, and they do this by going through the various books of the New Testament, the various authors and their way of showing what Christ said and did and means, and especially keys in on His role in salvation, because that is what is so important to us, is it not?

Many scholars go beyond even this to study the Jewish expectations of Messiah. Their Christology, if you will. That is, how He fulfills the role of Israel's Messiah. And so you can go back into the Old Testament and have a

certain Christology, looking at the Messianic passages and that sort of thing. There is also historical Christology, that is, how various persons or groups or churches or eras since Jesus' birth have viewed and developed their understanding of Him, of Christ. So you have all these different things that Christologists go into, all those things they study, and it is a very broad study.

And because the study of Christ has become so broad, it spawned various categories of Christology. You are not just a Christologist, you are a *certain kind* of Christologist. You could be a Jewish Christologist, you could be whatever, but Catholic Christologists and Eastern Christologists, name any of the denominations and you could become a Christologist according to that particular belief. But the ones that are most important to us today are high Christology and low Christology.

Let us get low Christology out of the way. Low Christology views Jesus as a mere man. Remember, He was made lower than the angels. So that is low Christology, that He was, as one scholar put it,

[A] wandering Jewish peasant who tried to reform Judaism, provoked the Jewish authorities, and was put to death for His impertinence, and His disciples then made Him into a God.

Meaning there was nothing Godlike about Him necessarily other than that He was made in the image of God and He was later raised, if you will, by human beings into the position of God and therefore the Head of the church. Low Christologists tend to disbelieve things like Christ's miracles, His resurrection from the dead, and anything else that points to Him as being in any way extra-human because of course, as low Christologists, they believed that He was like you and me, human as anybody.

Now, you have to really search and reach to be a low Christologist, and they seem to revel in the fact that they *are* low Christologists because they are full of their own human nature and they think they know better than God. But if you look in the Bible for any kind of low Christology, you will find that the pickings there are pretty pitiful because that is not how the Bible presents Jesus Christ. I want to go to four scriptures that low Christologists go to—all

of these are in the gospels—just as examples. And I want you to see the things that they point to as supporting their understanding or belief in low Christology.

So let us go to Matthew 21 first and we will get a general idea of how this works. We are just going to pull this right out of the the context here. This is just after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He went into the Temple, He went to Bethany, and then in the morning He returned to Jerusalem.

Matthew 21:18 Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry.

Low Christologists say, "Ah ha! There you go. This proves it. He was a human being because He got hungry. If He wasn't a human being, if He was God, He would never get hungry."

Let us go to Mark the 13th chapter and see another one that they point to. This is in the middle of the Olivet prophecy.

Mark 13:32 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

If He were God He would know, but because He was human, He was limited in knowledge and therefore He is human. We do not believe, they would say, that He was anything more than human. Are you getting the drift here of how they cherry pick these scriptures? Let us go to the one I chose in Luke. This is when He is a young boy growing up into manhood.

Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

They believe that if He were not human but God, He would not need to grow. He would *know* everything. He would *be* wise. He would not need to grow in any respect because He was God. And so because it says very plainly that He grew, He must have been just a man. You see how their mind works.

Finally, in John the fourth chapter. This is a similar one to what we saw in Matthew.

John 4:6 [Jesus is in Samaria] Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

So, He was human, obviously, because He got tired. If He were a God, He could go for days and days without feeling anything.

This is the general atmosphere of the idea of low Christology—that He was a mere man. He got hungry, He got thirsty, He got tired, He had to grow, He had become more in knowledge, etc. If He were a God, they say, He would not have to do any of these things, He would not be struck by any kind of weakness at all.

On the other hand, let us get to high Christology now. High Christology is the opposite end of the spectrum of Christology as a whole. High Christology teaches that the one who became Jesus Christ preexisted as the Word of God, that He was the God of the Old Testament, that He was God in the flesh during His human lifetime, and that He is God today and will always be God into the infinite future, sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. And much more could be said, I could go on and on extolling His titles and His positions that He has, but we will get into some of that as we go on.

But everything in high Christology essentially points to His eternal divinity and preeminence as the eternal companion of the Most High God. That He is our Savior, our High Priest, and our soon coming King of kings. All of these things are *high* positions, if you will. There is nothing low about any of them.

The Bible, as you might guess, is full of high Christology, because that is how it presents Jesus Christ. It is the prevailing view in the whole of Scripture and I am frankly dumbfounded as to why there would be low Christologists, except for the fact that Satan the Devil and human nature are running rampant in this world. I mean, if you look at the Bible with an open objective mind, there is no way you could get low Christology. It would always be high Christology. But this just shows you the power of the Devil

and this world and the very easily-corrupted mind of man. Anyway, as I mentioned, it is the Bible's prevailing view of Christ, this high Christology.

We could go into the Old Testament and read the Messianic psalms, like Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. All of them indicate that He is either God, it makes it very plain statement that the Messiah is God, or that He has Godlike attributes, things that only God could fulfill. You have Messianic prophecies, whether in the Psalms or in any of the books of the prophets, like Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 33, or Daniel 7, Daniel 9, Zechariah 6, Zechariah 9, Zechariah 13 and 14. You go to any of those and many more and they all point out that this Messiah that is coming is God—He is going to be King, He is going to be Savior, He is going to forgive our sins. No mere man can do any of those things.

Now, I want to do as we did with the low Christology and see just a few examples in the gospels, one from each gospel, examples of high Christology so we can see what we are talking about there. Let us go back to Matthew, this time in chapter 1, and we will see that when Jesus Christ is mentioned first thing, it is high Christology. Well, not the first thing actually, there was one time before in this chapter where He is mentioned, but even when it is there, it is "Jesus who is called Christ."

Matthew 1:18-23 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. [There you go. There is there is one bit of it.] Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit [doubles down on it]. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus [Look at the margin. You find Jesus means Savior. The angel goes on.], for He will save His people from their sins. Now, all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

So we open up the New Testament here to the book of Matthew and the first thing that is mentioned about this Child, not only is He the one that is the Christ, but He is, as it says, a child conceived of the Holy Spirit or through the means of the Holy Spirit, that He will be Savior, He will save His people from their sins, and that He is the fulfillment of prophecy, a specific prophecy that says that God is coming and He is going to live with men—God with us.

We open the New Testament and high Christology slaps us right in the face, if you will. Let us go to Mark 4.

Mark 4:35-41 On the same day [a day when Jesus had been quite busy], when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another., "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Here we have an example of Jesus Christ, having just been woken out of a deep sleep, standing up in this boat and calming the sea, calming the storm by His voice, by His very rebuking of the elements as Creator God. He shows His awesome power. He is very much extra-human in this little passage.

Let us go on to Luke the 22nd chapter. This is at His trial. He is before the Sanhedrin.

Luke 22:66-71 As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them,

"If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of power of God." Then they said, "Are you then the Son of God?" And He said to them, "You rightly say that I am." And they said, "What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

Christ believed in high Christology, that He was the Son of God, that He would sit on the right hand of the power of God. He confirmed it right here in the midst of His trial, that He was not just a human, He was God in the flesh.

Let us go to John, chapter 8. One of my favorite little vignettes in the life of Christ.

John 8:53-59 [He is having quite an explosive discussion with the Jews] And they asked Him, "Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? [I mean, you cannot get any greater than that, right?] And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?" Jesus said, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

That is a bit extra-human, if you ask me. He is saying "I was before Abraham and I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." He knew Abraham, knew Him as His friend. And then after they picked up stones to throw at Him, after He said that He was the "I AM," He did a miracle and slipped by them without them knowing, going right

through their midst. That is pretty good proof there. Do you want to know who God is? He says, "I am God" and then He is not there anymore. Pretty slick, but high Christology all the way.

Those are only four representative passages in the gospels and the Bible contains many, many, many more instances of what we would call high Christology. Every healing, every exorcism, every use of the term Son of Man or Son of God, or Savior or Immanuel or any of His other exalted titles, much of His teaching, the transfiguration, His declaration to Pilate that He was a king, that if it were His time, He and all His servants would fight, that sort of thing, His resurrection of course, and His ascension—all of them pile proof upon proof that high Christology is the correct understanding. Any low Christological sayings that we find in the Bible are not contradictions of this by any means. Because Jesus Christ was *human and divine*.

It is not a zero sum game, that is, that He was human *or* divine. It does not work that way. He was both. And if you want to get into that a little bit more (I do not have time to do that in my sermon here), you might want to read my dad's article, "Fully Man and Fully God?" which you can find in the February 2001 issue of *Forerunner*. (Actually, that was the second time we had run that particular article. We did it also in 1994.) So you could find it easily on <https://www.cgg.org>.

So after the apostles died out, the visible church, that is, what we call the Catholic Church, under the influence of Gnosticism, which was growing in power and Neoplatonism, which was sweeping the Mediterranean as a way of thinking, this visible church argued the nature of Jesus Christ ad-nauseam. There was heresy after heresy and council after council in which they had to argue and debate about what Jesus was, who Jesus was. By AD 451, that is a long time from Jesus Christ, another 400 years and some from Jesus Christ, at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, the visible church, the Catholic Church, adopted a position known today as the Chalcedonian Creed that Jesus Christ was "truly God and truly man," or as it is said more often today, "fully God and fully man." I want to read part of this.

Consubstantial with the Father as to His Godhead, and
consubstantial also with us as to His manhood. Like unto us in all
things, yet without sin. As to His Godhead, begotten of the Father

before all worlds, but as to His manhood in these days, born for us men and for our salvation of the virgin Mary, the mother of God, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, known in two natures, without confusion, without conversion, without severance, and without division. The distinction of the natures being in no wise abolished by their union, but the peculiarity of each nature being maintained and both concurring in one person and subsistence. We confess not a son divided and sundered into two persons, but one and the same God and only begotten and God, Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I guess your head is spinning just like mine is. But the Bible makes it so very simple. Why did they have to come up with something like that? Well, because they were full of philosophy and mysticism and Neoplatonism. But let us go to John the first chapter and we will see how John the apostle explained it, put it down, made it so easy to understand.

John 1:14 And the Word [that is this preexistent Being] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Very simple. God became a human. God, this Being, as Paul says in Philippians 2, He reduced Himself to the form of a servant. How He did that we do not know. Paul says that He gave up His glory, and He asked that God give Him His glory back when He was about to die. That was part of His prayer the night before, that He return to the glory that He had with Him. But, essentially, what we need to know is that God somehow became a man and lived as a man, and He was full of grace and truth. And even while He was a man, He had a kind of glory. Jesus was Immanuel—God with us.

As my dad wrote in that article that I mentioned, "Fully Man and Fully God?" "Jesus of Nazareth had as much of God's nature in Him as could be expressed in a human being." Pretty easy to understand, is it not? I heard him at one time, but probably during a sermon, say, "Jesus Christ had as much of God crammed into Him as a human mind and body could hold." I do not know if that is an exact quote, but it is pretty close, because He was still God, even though He was a man. It is that simple and it is that profound. No need for confusing creeds or scholarly rhetoric, things that make your head

spin. Yes, He was human and yes also, He was as divine as a human could be.

Now, with this understanding of high Christology, we are going to wade into what Paul wrote in Colossians. He lays out in no uncertain terms that all that we need in terms of salvation and preparation for the Kingdom of God can be found in Jesus Christ. We do not need philosophies, traditions of men, spiritual assistance from angels, or demons actually, nor do we need complex ritualistic works like asceticism or something like that. All we need is found in Christ, which he calls "our life." We are wrapped up in Him as much as anything could be. It says that in Colossians the third chapter. We are "in Him," we are hidden in Him, it says there. And if we understand that and respond properly to the position that we have been placed into, then that is what we need. That is *all* we need.

Just as a reminder, kind of connect this with the last sermon. Colossae was a city in Asia Minor in the Lycus Valley there, it lay ten miles east of Laodicea and five miles north of Laodicea was Hierapolis. So there were three churches there and they had all been evangelized, probably by Epaphras, and they probably all had the same pastor, Archippus, which is mentioned at the end of Colossians. Now, while Colossae was originally the larger and more prominent city, by the time of this epistle, which was written about 60 or 61 AD, Laodicea had surpassed it. It had become greater, wealthier, more prominent, and Colossae was slowly fading in significance. Like Laodicea, Colossae's chief industry was the production of woolen articles, particularly those made from a distinctive dark color of wool, which is actually across the Mediterranean, called Colossian wool.

There was a significant population of Jews in Colossae and they were known far and wide across Jewdom, across all of wherever Jews were, they were known to be liberal or syncretic, and lax. The Jews of Colossae were pretty much Jews in name only. In the main, Colossian Christians were influenced by a whole slew of things that were going on in the empire at the time. Obviously they were influenced by their native Hellenism, Greek things. They were influenced by paganism. All the gods, both of Phrygia and of Greece, and of Rome. They were influenced by the emperor cult and all the libations and whatnot that they had to pour out for the emperor and all the things that they had to do to maintain their social status as Roman citizens.

And, of course, there were the prevailing philosophies that were always circulating around in these Hellenized cities. Obviously what happened in Athens was probably the pinnacle of all that. But these Hellenized cities tried to do the same things themselves. They had their philosophers, they had their discussions, and they talked about these quite a bit. Remember, they did not have tv, radio, Internet, that sort of thing. They went down to a public square, they went to the Acropolis, they went to wherever it was that people met and they discussed philosophy, discussed the newest ideas, and these things circulated through their cities very quickly. People really thought about them and they put them into practice and this includes what is called Incipient Gnosticism at the time.

Gnosticism was not full-fledged by this point but it was very much beginning and these ideas were popping up and a lot of them had to do with the nature of Christ, the nature of the gods, the nature of how you go from physical corruption to spiritual perfection. Just like you, they wanted to go along that path. But they, being influenced by the basic principles of this world, demons and other such things, philosophies, and whatnot, were trying to get there in their own life. And so they came up with these things, some of which I think were just out of the blue or whatever, but some of them also touched base with Neoplatonic thought and other Greek thought that had come down to them.

And so they had these ideas about what the Savior would be like. And one of these ideas, we talk about it fairly frequently, is Docetism in which they believed that Christ was of two natures. That He was man in one form and then He had another nature which was spiritual and those two could not really mix. And so, when Jesus went up on the cross, Christ, the spiritual one, was not there because He could not suffer that sort of thing, that humility, that degradation of being on the cross and being killed, stuff like that. When Jesus walked, He did not leave footprints because He was spiritual and not physical, and all these things. And plus they had all these steps you had to take. There were x number of levels that you worked up and you told an angel this or you did the certain thing and you could go on to the next level, and on and on and up, and each time you went up a level, you became more spiritual, you gained more knowledge, and you became more like like the Savior, like God Himself.

All these things were impacting on the Colossians: the Gnosticism, the philosophies, the Hellenism, Latin things, Roman things, Jewish things, what have you. So they were hearing all these things in town from their neighbors and they were also members of the church (talking about the Colossian Christians), and these two things were battling them. Paul is writing this letter to the Colossians to keep them rooted and grounded in the truth, to give them some ammo, if you will, to combat these ideas that were coming from these various outside sources.

And so this is why he writes Colossians in the way he does because he wants to give them reasons why they should believe him and Jesus Christ and do what God has asked of them, rather than the things that look so appealing in these other systems that they were hearing about in their daily life there in Colossae. So he is giving them all that they need, the understanding they need to combat these things and to hold firm in their belief in Jesus Christ. But it did not work. I hate to put that to you. I should say it did not work *fully*. It would have been nice if it had. But I think Paul knew that he was facing a losing battle.

Acts 20 is part of Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders. And there could very possibly have been more than just the Ephesian elders, but also elders from nearby cities. Perhaps Archippus was part of this group, I do not know. But notice what he says here in verse 29, which took place about AD 56 or so. This is even before he writes the letter to Colossians.

Acts 20:29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

Paul knew that it was happening right under his nose, that these ideas were coming in, and he prophesies here that it was going to get worse. Finally, if we go to II Timothy 1, which is right near the end of his life, so we are past his writing of the book of Colossians. This is maybe four or five years later.

II Timothy 1:15 This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

So between Acts 20 and II Timothy 1, the church in Asia had collapsed, and what was left there in Asia, what Christianity remained seems to have been small and weak, slowly succumbing to the apathetic and lax attitude reflected in Christ's letter to Laodicea. Some of the churches we know were okay, Philadelphia was okay, Smyrna had a lot of problems, but they were okay spiritually. But most of those other churches—Ephesus, Thyatira, Pergamos, Sardis, Laodicea, Colossae—they had problems, pretty bad problems that Jesus Christ had to address.

Now if the Colossian and Laodicean churches took the high Christology in Paul's epistle seriously and began minimizing the works that he showed them that they needed to do in chapters 3 and 4, what it tells me, what I conclude, is that high Christology alone is not enough to ensure faithfulness and longevity in the church of God. That word "alone" is very important. High Christology alone is not enough to ensure faithfulness and longevity. In fact, if the letter to the Laodiceans is any measure, high Christology or a high view of Christ, by itself, can produce insipid Christians who neglect both good works and ironically, their relationship with Christ.

Does that sound familiar? That is what I spoke about last time, which I said is what essentially we have in Protestant Christianity today, a very high view of Jesus Christ. They think the world of Him, they speak about Him every week, but they do not do the works, they do not obey Him. And if they do not obey Him, well, let us go to a scripture where we will find out what happens.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Do you think these people had a high Christology? That they thought the world of Jesus Christ and they tried to do the things that they believed He wanted them to do, but they did not do what He actually told them to do? Pretty sad, is not it? Fatal.

Let us go back to the book of Colossians. I want you to notice the way Paul lays this out for them because he does not immediately jump into his high Christology. I want to start in verse 9, after he gets past the preliminaries of his letter there in which he praises them for their faith in Christ, which is kind of ironic too. But at this point they were doing okay, they were doing fine, but things were about to break loose pretty soon. I want to read verses 9 through 12 first. This is what Paul desires for them in terms of their growth. Hey, they had a good start. Now what?

Colossians 1:9-12 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it [meaning heard about how they were doing], do not cease to pray for you, and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

This is his opening salvo, if you will, of what they need to do to maintain their place, their position with Christ. They had begun well, they had heard the gospel, they had responded well to the gospel. They were doing fine and Epaphras comes back and reports to Paul that there are faithful people down there in Colossae and they are very happy about that. So he gives them these marching orders, what they need to do, what he expected to see in them should he ever visit them.

What he does here is that he kind of puts the beginning at the end. He puts what God has already done for them in verse 12: "giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." This is what God has done to help us—they—meet the requirements

for salvation. That is what that word that is translated "qualified us" means—that this is what God has done to put us in the position that we can inherit all things with Jesus Christ, along with all the other saints. It is a huge packet of things that He has done for us. And he does not specifically mention them here, but we can understand the things that he meant.

First of all, He called us. He chose us out of the world. If He did not do that very first thing, nothing else would ever happen. That is maybe *the* most important thing that ever happened in any one of our lives; that He said, "Hmm, him" or "Hmm, her." "I want these ones and I'm going to call them to Myself, call them to Jesus Christ."

Then what did He do? He revealed Himself to us. This is the true God. He gives people faith to believe in the true God and Jesus Christ, and He gives them grace. He grants forgiveness. He grants repentance, and He justifies us, finally, by the blood of Jesus Christ so that we can come into His presence and have a relationship with Him. This scratches the surface. This is just the broad categories of the things that God has done for us to qualify us or to make us meet the requirements for salvation, for our inheritance. Ultimately, our glorification with Christ. Without those things that God did, nothing else would be possible.

So he kind of backloads this thing, puts that last. But he tells us, hey, be thankful for what God has done. We should have a heart of just out-flowing gratitude for what God Himself has done for us. That the very supreme Ruler and Almighty God of this universe knows us, chose us, and has brought us into a relationship with Him that will last for all eternity. That right there should give you props or whatever to go for at least, I do not know, a lifetime. If you have faith, it will.

Before this though, he gives what he expects of them, the Colossians, in those first three verses, 9 through 11, and I want to go through these things of what Paul expects and what we can assume that Jesus Christ expects, and God the Father expects, of us once we have been qualified for this position.

First, they were to be filled with the knowledge of Christ's will, "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." What he means here is that if we are filled, if we learn, if we grow in the

knowledge of Christ's will; that is, what He wants, what He desires, then we can begin to grow in *wisdom* and in *spiritual understanding*. Those things are linked right there. If we are filled with the knowledge of His will, it will be in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

They were to learn, you could say, what Christ expected of them. We do this by reading the Scripture, reading the commandments, reading the other principles and such that Jesus had taught His disciples, what the apostles then, in their own ministries, taught the churches which are written in the epistles and in other places in the New Testament. And this enhances wisdom. What is wisdom? We have learned about that, it is skill in living. When we understand what Christ expects of us, then we should have ammo, we should have what it takes, we should have the understanding to live skillfully, to live properly before God, and therefore, in living that way, we have a stronger grasp of God's purpose and work in us.

Now, verse 9 is what we might call the mental or educational side of Christian life. We are being filled up through study about knowledge, it is filled up with His knowledge, filled up with spiritual understanding, filled up with wisdom, knowing what is the right way to live. So this is kind of the head part of Christianity, if you will, that he goes to in verse 9. Then he goes to verse 10, where he says that they are to have a walk, that is, they are to have a manner of living, have a way of life, notice these words: "worthy of the Lord." And then he adds "fully pleasing Him." That is a high bar.

Once you have this spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that he mentioned in verse 9, then you should apply this in a walk that is reminiscent of Christ's walk, of Jesus' own walk! One that it would be worthy of Him walking. That is impossible, we think. But with God's Spirit, it is not really impossible. We just make it impossible because of our stupid human nature and our holding back. But it can be done. We can have a walk worthy of the Lord, a walk that will please Him. Abraham did. Noah did. Enoch did. Many others did. They made their mistakes. We kind of look at them and laugh and say, "Ha ha ha. Wow, I can't believe they did that." But ultimately, they had a walk that was worthy of the Lord and that pleased Him and we can too.

So, our works are to produce fruit, especially in terms of character growth. And then what they also do is they add experiential knowledge of God to an

expanding fund of godly knowledge. Our works that we do are very important. Remember the two things: they produce fruit, meaning character that will go through the grave into the Kingdom of God, but they also are additive in terms of when we do the good works we learn and grow in other knowledge, practical knowledge, knowledge we get by actually doing things and experiencing life under the way of God and that adds, then, to our wisdom and our spiritual understanding. These things go hand-in-hand. Verse 10 is more like the body part, if you will, of this Christian life. We had the head part in verse 9. This is actually what we do with it in living it on the ground, as it were, in verse 10.

Then we get to verse 11. This growth—both inside and out, both head growth and actually living it out in life growth—accomplished within a relationship with God and Christ does what? It adds strength, it adds power, it adds might from God Himself. See, He was not just sitting back watching us through all this. He is continually adding to us through His Spirit as we do these things. And what He does is He adds power to us, His *own* power, while we take these steps that we should be taking as His children, so that when rough times come, and they will come to a child of God (we are told that we will suffer suffer persecution if we go this way), when we need the endurance, when we need to be longsuffering, to have that virtue, we will be able to overcome the persecution, we will be able to overcome the trials with joy and thanksgiving, because we have the strength—His strength.

See, we are always looking toward the future, this growing in knowledge and growing in experiential knowledge by doing what is right and good, by good works, they are all leading to something. In this physical life, it is leading to being stronger as we go forward through this life so that when the bad times come, we will be able to endure to the end, and then of course, beyond that it is leading to what we will do in the Kingdom of God, what He is preparing us for. So it has a what you might call a physical present benefit and it also has a spiritual or eternal benefit in the Kingdom of God. But we need to be doing these things or they do not get built.

So, even before telling us how glorious, eternal, central, and powerful Jesus Christ is, Paul advises us that our discipleship consists of a whole package of proper responses to our calling. And it is not just enough to have that initial response. This response to God's calling and His work in us has to be

continual, continuous, it never ends. We *always* have to respond to God because He is constantly giving us things, He is constantly adding to us. And what do we do? We respond through faith, through obedience, to continuing to grow and to endure to the end, and all those things that we have to do.

Hearing the gospel, remember in my last sermon and I said that a minister said you had to preach the gospel every time you speak. That is not enough. Hearing the gospel is not enough and responding to it initially is not enough. You know, making the altar call and going up and saying, "I give my heart to the Lord" is not enough. It is necessary at the beginning to do that, to respond to God's call and to be baptized, to enter the church, and do what is expected of us in that way.

But it is not enough. It cannot stop there afterward. After that initial first love or a burst of enthusiasm comes a lifetime of learning and growing and doing and practicing and bearing fruit and glorifying God in everything. There is no let-up. There should not be a let-up. Once we begin to let up, we open a door for Satan to get in there, distract us, and make that let-up last for a long time until we drift away. Christianity, as presented here by Paul, is a full slate of prioritizing Christ, forsaking all else, bearing our crosses, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and enduring to the end. That is a walk worthy of the Lord. Do you know why I can say that? Because He did it.

Colossians 1:13-18 [This is the heart of the high Christological teaching.] He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

People who study these things say that much of this sounds like a creedal statement. Perhaps even part of a song, a hymn, the church members learned

by heart to remember and meditate on throughout the week. They say this because it covers all the major bases of Christ's divinity, humanity, work, and sovereignty. It gives a good picture of who our Savior and our Lord really is.

He begins here in verse 13 with the stark reality of our transference from the power of darkness or dominion of darkness into the reign or rulership or sovereign dominion of Christ. And it is very stark. It is like black and white, as he put it here, darkness and light. It is going from one end of a very bad thing, very evil thing, to the other end of a very good thing and wonderful thing. We have gone from the evils and the harm on one side to the safety and loving care of the Father's own beloved Son on the other. It is two totally distinct and separate worlds.

Paul is trying to get across to us that our salvation is a deliverance! It is a rescue! It is like you were in the worst situation that you could ever think of and God, through Christ, snatched you out of it and put you then into the very best situation that you could ever be in. It is going from one end of the spectrum to the other. It is going from evil and harm and death to goodness, security, and life. It may not seem that way sometimes, but this is how it is. It is really true. That is how God looks at it. There is no comparison between the two states. Christ's rule, Christ's loving care, is so superior to what we have been saved from that we should have zero desire to return to that former life—to that awful chaos and futility of the world ruled by the power of darkness.

Remember, Paul is writing this to a church that is having trouble with people trying to pull them out of their good situation back into the world, and he said, you should not want to do that at all. You should be fighting this tooth and nail because you have got it good and you do not seem to realize it.

Next he tells us that we have Christ to thank for this because it was His blood which He voluntarily shed for us that redeems us. It buys us out of that terrible situation. His life was paid so that we could be delivered from that evil situation, that evil state. His blood pays for our sins so that we might have forgiveness and grace and therefore life, because the trajectory of that other way was all toward death. But He makes it possible for there to be life at the end of our way.

Now he expands this in verses 19 through 22, which I will read here.

Colossians 1:19-22 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable in His sight.

He purposely bookends the high Christology verses 15 through 19 with these statements about our indebtedness to Christ. He wants to remind us that without Him, without what He has done for us, we would be nowhere, just as when before we were nowhere. We would have nothing, we would be totally unredeemed, unforgiven, unenlightened, without hope, and without real life. We would have a life that would end in our death and nothing more, except for His gracious redemption and reconciliation. And he tells us here in these latter verses that He is still at work. He is constantly at work in our behalf, as John 5:17 says, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Because He is our High Priest and He is working to make us holy and blameless and irreproachable before God. That is His job. He is working day and night to produce the best fruit that He has ever produced on His vine. (You might want to jot down Hebrews 7:24-27.)

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

That is what they are doing right now with you, with me, with all those whom He has called. Just as he says here in verse 22, He is trying to present us holy and blameless and irreproachable in His sight.

Colossians 1:15-18 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that

are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Here Paul pulls out the big guns. These are the things that are supposed to convince us that we are going along on the right path. He leaves no doubt that the Son, Jesus Christ, has no equal in heaven or on earth other than the Father Himself. And Jesus Christ says there in John 14:28, that the Father is greater than He. In fact, Paul begins by saying that Christ is the *image* of God. David [Grabbe] mentioned this in a sermonette. The icon, as it were. That is the actual Greek word—the icon of the invisible God.

This means that Jesus Christ is the perfect representation or maybe even better, the *exact* manifestation of Almighty God, because manifestation has the opposite idea of invisible God. So Jesus was the manifestation in the flesh of the invisible God who is in the Spirit. This is what Jesus meant when He told Philip in John 14:9, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say 'Show us the Father'?" They are so much alike. They are so similar in everything, specifically in Their holiness and Their righteous character.

They are so unified in purpose and will that they are, to all intents and purposes, exactly alike. If They were in the same room, you would do a double take. They are like twins, but They are not. I am not saying that, but They are so much alike that to find the difference between Them would be impossible. The difference is that the Son submits to the Father. But that is how much They are alike.

So, in appearing in human flesh and living sinlessly and healing the sick and preaching the gospel and teaching His disciples, Jesus Christ revealed the Father. He said, "Hey, if you ever want to see what God looks like, here He is!" Just think, if the roles had been reversed, if the Father had come to earth instead of Jesus Christ the Son, the result would have been exactly the same. Christ is God. He is not the Father, but He is so much like the Father that They do everything exactly the same. Their words are the same. Their

thoughts are the same. Their will is the same. Their purpose is the same. They are unified. They are one, even though They are two. They are one because they are on the same wavelength, as we say.

Paul says here that He is the firstborn. Jesus Christ is the firstborn over all creation. This does not mean that He is the first created being, as some have mistakenly taught. Paul had just said that He is the icon or the image of the invisible God. So, He is God. Firstborn though, *prototokos* in Greek, means "preeminent," "first in rank and importance," and this is the one I like the most, "having all the power, the prerequisites, and prerogatives of the firstborn." And note, He is *over* all creation or *superior* to all creation as its Creator, which he gets to next. He is the creation's Sovereign Lord.

Verse 16 then gets into the creation. It restates Genesis 1, it restates John 1, it restates other verses like Ephesians 3:9 where it is plain that the Word, the one who became Jesus Christ, is the Creator of all things. Not just earth, not just the things we see around us, but all heavenly things too, like angels, even archangels, things we cannot see. He is the Creator of those things as well. And all these things that have power, like angels, angels in their various offices have various powers. Or demons, they have power as well for the time being. But even they owe their existence to Him and they are still subject to Him. How many times in the gospels does a demon come up to Christ and say, "Don't do this or don't do that?" And He tells them what to do or they ask Him for permission to do something. Or Satan himself, after tempting Him, Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" and Satan did, he left. "Away with you!" and he left. That is in Matthew 4:10-11.

So Paul is telling us, why would we want to have anything to do with these created things when we could follow the great Creator of all things? Why serve a flunky when you could just as well better serve the Boss? Then Paul reiterates that Jesus is the means of creation, He did it. He is the one that it was done through, and adds that creation ultimately exists *for* Him. It is His inheritance. He is going to be over all things, right? He is going to inherit all things and we with Him are going to inherit all things. He owns it. He has all authority over it.

In verse 17, Paul reaffirms that Christ, as the Word, existed long before everything in creation and is thus superior to it in every regard. And then he

adds, echoing Hebrews 1:3, that He sustains all things, that in Him all things, as it puts here, consists or maybe cohere would be a good word, or hold together. If you took Jesus Christ out of the mix of life, everything would dissolve into nothingness. That is how integral He is into His creation. And of course, we have to take that the next step in our lives. Without Christ we are nothing.

Paul then gets very personal and present. Basically that he answers the question: What is Christ doing now? He says this powerful Being is the living personal Head, the Leader, the Executive, the Controller, the *Life-source* of the church. He is working in its work, the church's work, as a body. And in a few verses Paul brings out that He is personally working in us as individuals. There is not a greater Being that could be the Head of the church. We have Number One, as it were, leading us. He also calls him the beginning, *Arche*, which means the origin or the source, the first or the prime, as well as the firstborn from the dead, which suggests again the heir, the one with the power, prerequisites, and prerogatives of the firstborn, whom the Father raised from the dead as the first of many sons and daughters.

And then he ends with this, "that in all things He may have the preeminence." That is the big word of this whole paragraph. He is *preeminent* in *everything*, in every category that you want to assign. He is Number One, He is prime, He is first. There is no one higher.

Let us finish in Colossians 2. This is what Paul was meaning by giving this section on what I have been calling, the high Christology of Christ.

Colossians 2:8-10 Beware [Colossians and us] lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the divine nature [or divinity] bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power [meaning you do not need anything else].

The Father has chosen us to live under the care of Christ, who is God Himself and preeminent in everything. Why should we pay any attention to

the ideas of anyone or anything of lesser stature? That is what he is saying: in Him is *everything* we need, all the fullness of the divine nature is in Christ. There is nothing that He lacks. So, it is all there in Him. And he is saying here too that in this fullness of the divine nature, we participate. We are part of that. Just jot down John 1:16, if you will. We are part of that by being united with Him, by having an intimate relationship that brings us into perfection or completion, that true spiritual maturity and preparation for His Kingdom.

So, let us sum this up. High Christology is good and right. We should always be aware that the One we serve is powerful—*ultra-powerful*—and preeminent in all things. But we can never let it slip from our mind that He requires a response from us, one of living worthy of Him, the great and awesome God, before the world.