

# GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL COME LORD JESUS GOD’S PRISONER

## *Paul Magnifies Christ in Prison*

The story is told of Leonardo da Vinci who took a friend to criticize his masterpiece of the ‘Last Supper,’ and the remark of the friend was, ‘The most striking thing in the picture is the cup!’ The artist took his brush and wiped out the cup as he said, ‘Nothing in my painting shall attract more attention than the face of my Master!’ This lesson is to encourage us to magnify – that is glorify Christ – lift up the name of Jesus – no matter where you are.

The book of Colossians is one of the letters Paul wrote to the church in Colossae during his Roman imprisonment. Colossae was located about 100 miles inland from Ephesus. This church is not mentioned in the book of Acts since Paul did not found it and he never visited there. However, this church was an outgrowth of Paul’s three year ministry in Ephesus. Today, we might call it a satellite church. During Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, at least two men from Colossae came to know Jesus, Epaphras and Philemon. Epaphras visited Paul during his Roman incarceration. As a result of that visit, Paul was led by the Spirit to write a letter to a congregation that he had never personally met. Paul was, however, bound together with them in the name of Christ.

Some false doctrines were being taught in Colossae and were invading the church. The false teachers there, like the false teachers of our own day, didn’t necessarily deny the importance of Jesus Christ. People today will say that Jesus was a good man who lived a long time ago or even a prophet like other prophets. False teachers then and now prefer to **dethrone** Christ as Lord of All by giving Him prominence but not preeminence. Let’s be clear: preeminence means Christ is supreme – the One and Only. *Exodus 20:3 (ESV)*<sup>3</sup> “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” This truth does not change! Likely the false teachers in Colossae were teaching that Jesus Christ was but one of many divine revelations that proceeded from God and through which men could reach God.

In Colossae there was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, with elements of what Bible scholars call Gnosticism. To refresh your memory, the Gnostics were people who were looked upon as being ‘in the know’ when it came to the deep things of God. Keep in mind that today just because someone has been to seminary or even goes to church every Sunday does not necessarily mean they know Christ better than you do. They may have more head knowledge but not necessarily more heart knowledge. Satan is good at deception! He will borrow Christian vocabulary for the purpose of getting us ‘off the narrow way’. On top of the Gnosticism, the Colossians were dealing with Jewish legalism – the idea that the rite of circumcision and dietary laws were helpful in spiritual development.

**Christ is preeminent in His reconciling all things.**

**Read Colossians 1:15-19 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* <sup>16</sup> *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.* <sup>17</sup> *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* <sup>18</sup> *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.* <sup>19</sup> *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*

Reconcile can be defined as restoring friendly relationships. Reconcile can also mean to make one account consistent with another. Jesus is unsurpassed in reconciling all things! Down through history and still today there are those who would deny the deity of Jesus Christ. To understand these verses is to realize how wonderful He really is. Paul gives us nine marks of the identification of Christ.

(1) *Jesus is the image of the Invisible God.* Photography is an amazing invention of man. From a photo we can see the exact image of a person, place of thing. Think of all the Hollywood stars, politicians and television personalities that we recognize although we have never personally seen them. How could Jesus be the image of the invisible God? There can be no photograph of the invisible God. That is why Jesus came in the flesh. That is how Jesus became the image of the invisible God. How could He be that? Because He is God. If He were not God, He could not have been the image of the invisible God.

(2) *Firstborn of all creation.* Firstborn in this context is not a description of a firstborn child but instead indicates first priority. Jesus Christ was not the first being created – Adam was. Jesus Himself is the Creator of all things. *Firstborn of all Creation* means BEFORE Creation. Jesus Christ is not a created being; He is eternal God. Although there was a point in history that God took on bodily form, Jesus still existed before anything else was created. By the way, Jesus is also the *firstborn of the dead* and that makes an eternal difference for us! One of the teachings of Gnostics concerned what they called the demiurge or creator. This demiurge was not all-good, but a bungling and incompetent fool that created the world as a spiritual prison. This demiurge created a creature just beneath Him; then that creature created a creature beneath him and so on. Paul wrote concerning God's story in **Galatians 1:11 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.* The demiurge is something man made up the gospel of Jesus is not.

(3) *By him all things were created.* Since all things were created by Him that answers the questions that Jesus is not a creature but the Creator. Our God, our Jesus created the things we can see and also the things we cannot see. Just because we cannot see the spiritual world does not mean it does not exist.

(4) *All things were created ... for him.* Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Malthie Babcock was a pastor in Lockport, New York, Babcock liked to hike in an area called the escarpment. This was an ancient upthrust ledge near Lockport. It had a marvelous 15 mile view of farms, orchards, and Lake Ontario. That view inspired Babcock to write these words: This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears all nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres. This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought of rocks and trees, of skies and seas; His hand the wonders wrought. Consider this: Paul wrote

that we live in this world in a tent (**2 Cor. 5:1**). Our Father who created this world as beautiful as it is – is preparing a home in heaven for us that will last forever.

(5) *He is before all things.* Incarnation is a theological term for the coming of God's Son into the world as a human being. Jesus is also Preincarnate. This means that before He was born to the virgin Mary, He existed. In fact, He appeared in the Old Testament as the Angel of the Lord. Jesus was there at creation. **Genesis 1:26 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over ... all the earth..."*

(6) *In him all things hold together.* McGee says, "Jesus is the super glue that holds this earth together." **Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *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. When we feel that our little personal universe is falling apart, we take comfort that our God – our Jesus is holding everything together.*

(7) *He is the head of the body, the church.* We may quickly declare that the universe is His but we like think of the church as ours. It is not! The church is not a building – the church is God's people – the called out ones – called out to share the good news of life in Christ and magnify His holy name.

(8) *In everything he might be preeminent.* God is moving forward today undeviatingly, unhesitatingly, uncompromisingly toward one goal. That goal is to put His Son, Jesus, on the throne. **Philippians 2:10-11 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* <sup>11</sup> *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

(9) *In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.* The word for fullness is pleroma. In **Philippians 2:7** we are told that Jesus emptied (kenosis) Himself. He emptied Himself of His glory and became a servant. Jesus did not empty Himself of His deity. Even as a babe in the manger the pleroma or fullness of God still dwelt in Him. Jesus is God. That is who He is.

### **Christ is preeminent in His reconciling us to God.**

**Read Colossians 1:20-23 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.* <sup>21</sup> *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* <sup>22</sup> *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,* <sup>23</sup> *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.*

Jesus the Son became a man for the purpose of reconciling us to God the Father. Sin caused a division between God and man that only a blood sacrifice can alleviate. **Hebrews 9:22 (ESV)** <sup>22</sup> *Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no*

*forgiveness of sins.* God promised death to Adam and Eve and all who would come after because of their sin of disobedience. But, Jesus shed His own blood to pay the debt and reconcile us to God Himself.

Because of sin, Adam and Eve and all their generations became alienated from God. Christ's death provided a way for all people to come to God. It cleared away the sin that keeps us from having a right relationship with our Holy God. This does not mean that everyone has been saved but that the way has been cleared for anyone who will trust Christ to be saved. It is the blood of Jesus that reconciles us to God. Our sin debt is not paid with money – it is paid with the blood of Jesus. No wonder Paul could magnify Jesus from a prison cell!

Those who believe that an individual can lose their salvation might quote verse 23 as a proof text. The use of the word *if* does not suggest doubt or lay down a condition for keeping our salvation.

Paul used an architectural image in this verse—a house, firmly set on the foundation. The town of Colossae was located in a region known for earthquakes, and the word translated *not shifting* can mean earthquake stricken. Paul was saying, "If you are truly saved, and built on the solid foundation, Jesus Christ, then you will continue in the faith and nothing will move you. Paul did not pretend to know who in Colossae were really born of God. Their readiness to adopt new and fanciful systems was a cause for grave concern. Those who are really children of God, grounded and strengthened in the truth, will not be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Knowing what it has already done for them, they will not lightly turn away from it to some new and untried theory. In other words, we are not saved by continuing in the faith. Continuing in the faith proves that we are saved.

### **Christ is preeminent in His reconciling us to one another.**

*Read Colossians 2:1-3 (ESV)* <sup>1</sup> For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, <sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Paul's soul was tortured when Christ was dishonored by those who professed His name. He was not a liberal theologian, tolerant of any teaching as long as it did not disrupt outward unity. The apostle was intensely concerned about the fact that at both Colossae and Laodicea, designing men were seeking to seduce the saints from their first love—that is, Christ. We know that the enemy was largely successful at Laodicea because of what Jesus said in **Revelation 3:15 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! Proud of their culture and wealth, they were indifferent to Christ. Paul sought to save the Laodiceans and Colossians from such indifference. It was Paul's desire that their hearts *be knit together in love*. We are not sure how the Colossians responded. We hope their response was positive. Sometimes a sermon or Bible study is directed specifically to one group like Paul wrote this letter to a specific group of believers. But, through the power of God, these words to the Colossians ring down through the centuries to hearts today reminding us as believers to be knit together in love. That is one glorious way to magnify Christ our Lord!