

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Christ Jesus in the Christ-Hymn

Colossians 1:15–20

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to the book of Colossians. We come today, church, to one of the most famous and recognizable sections of this book—Colossians 1:15–20.¹ Allow me to make some preliminary observations here as we begin.

The first observation is that the grammar and the sentence structure of this section are extremely difficult to discern.² Even for Paul, this section is unique. The syntax runs on. It has no ascertainable clarity as to when one sentence ends and another begins. And that has led scholars to rightly conclude that the genre of this particular section of Scripture is a song.³ This is a hymn, if you will. And that's why this section of six verses is referred to as the Christ-hymn of Colossians.

And that makes sense even from our vantage point. Because songs often lack clarity with punctuation and sentence structure. I've never been able to figure out punctuation in music—where to put what punctuation. And if you were to read a modern song that we sing on the screen without breaks or formatting, it would read a lot like Colossians 1:15–20.

Some scholars conclude that this was a preformed hymn that Paul (via Timothy) inserted here into his letter.⁴ Some scholars conclude that Paul wrote this hymn or poem extemporaneously as he was drafting this letter to Colossae.⁵ Either way, we have a pretty fantastic piece of theological art inserted into this letter.

What's this theological piece of art about? Well (shocker!), it's about Jesus. It's about Christology. And more particularly, it's about the two great works of Christ in this world—creation and

¹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 107: “This passage, the most famous in the letter, is one of the christological high points of the New Testament and provides a critical basis for the teaching of the letter.”

² Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 87: “Scholarly consensus is lacking when it comes to the structure of this hymn.”

³ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 89: “Most scholars consider this section a ‘hymn,’ a conclusion that is based on a number of features in this section: the use of relative clauses (vv. 15, 18), parallelism (vv. 15–16 and vv. 18b–20) and balance, the use of relative and personal pronouns as connectives, the self-contained nature of this unit, the presence of *hapax legomena*, similarities of style and subject matter with other early christological ‘hymns’ in Paul (Phil 2:6–11; 1 Tim 3:16), and references to “hymns” in this letter (Col 3:16; cf. 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19–20).”

⁴ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 85–6: “At all events, whether taken over in part or in whole, whether from pre-Christian or Christian material, whether composed entirely by Paul and Timothy or merely glossed by them, the passage can be quite properly classified as an early Christian hymn in which Christ is praised in language used commonly in Hellenistic Judaism in reference to divine Wisdom.”

⁵ For an assessment of the grammar, syntax, and structure of this section as a hymn set off from the rest of the context, see Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 107–10. Moo suggests the possibility too that this hymn was written by Paul for this letter and wasn't necessarily a preformed poem/song. “It is methodologically important, however, to make clear that whatever is asserted in these verses is genuinely ‘Pauline,’ whether he composed the whole passage from the ground up or whether he has taken over and modified for his own purposes a traditional text.”

redemption. It's not a song or poem *to* Christ; it's a song *about* Christ.⁶ It's about Christ's work in creation, and it's about Christ's work in redemption.

God the Father created all things *through* the agency of Christ. That's what's emphasized on the front side of this hymn. And God the Father redeemed all things *through* the agency of Christ's death on the cross. That's what's emphasized at the end of this hymn.⁷

And the word that best describes Christ Jesus in this Christ-hymn is the word "preeminence." He is preeminent over all things.

Many people say about Michael Jordan, that he's the G.O.A.T. (the Greatest Of All Time). Many say that of Tom Brady and Babe Ruth and Wayne Gretzky. The latest thing in San Antonio is talk about Victor Wembanyama. They say he's on a "G.O.A.T. trajectory." Someday he'll be the Greatest Of All Time. I've got lots of thoughts and opinions about all that stuff. I am, in many ways, an incurable sports fan.

But today, we are going to leave the trivialities of sports behind. And we are going to examine the true "Greatest Of All Time." Today, we explore the Jesus Christ revealed in Colossians 1:15–20.⁸ Let's talk about him.⁹

Go ahead and write this down as #1 in your notes. Today I'm going to give you eight answers to the question—Who is Jesus? I'm calling these,

Eight Descriptions of Christ in the Christ-hymn of Colossians 1:15–20:

Write 'em down, church. Here's #1. Jesus is...

1) The **Image** of the Invisible God (1:15a)

Paul writes in **verse 15**,

¹⁵ He is the image¹⁰ of the invisible¹¹ God,

Which prompts the question—who is the image of the invisible God? Who's the "He" of **verse 15**? The answer is found in **verses 13 and 14** just before this. Paul said in **verse 13**,

⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 86: "The hymn, it should be noted, is not addressed to Christ, but is in praise of Christ. The complementarity (rather than antithesis) between God's creative activity and redemptive activity is in a most striking way brought out and maintained by the crucial middle term, Christ, in, through, and to whom God has accomplished both his creative and his redemptive purposes."

⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 86: "We may fairly deduce that Paul and Timothy thought the preeminence of Christ, in terms both of creation and redemption, needed to be emphasized. But the absence of polemic suggests that Christ's status and significance were being devalued rather than attacked."

⁸ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 44: "[O]f all the Bible's teaching about Jesus Christ, none is more significant than Colossians 1:15–19. This dramatic and powerful passage removes any needless doubt or confusion over Jesus' true identity. It is vital to a proper understanding of the Christian faith."

⁹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 84: "Terms and phrases in this hymn that reappear in the rest of Colossians include 'the image' (v. 15; cf. 3:10), 'all' (vv. 15, 16 [2×], 17 [2×], 18, 19, 20, 23; cf. v. 28; 2:2, 3, 9, 10, 13 ... etc.), 'created' (v. 16; cf. 3:10), 'heaven' (vv. 16, 20; cf. 4:1), 'earth' (vv. 16, 20; cf. 3:2, 5), 'ruler ... authorities' (v. 16; cf. 2:10, 15), 'the head' (v. 18; cf. 10, 2:19), 'the body,' (v. 18; cf. v. 24; 2:11, 17, 19; 3:15), 'the church' (v. 18; cf. v. 24), 'from the dead' (v. 18; cf. 2:12, 13), 'fullness' (v. 19; cf. 2:9, 10), 'to dwell' (v. 19; cf. 2:9; 3:16), 'peace' (v. 20; cf. 3:15), and 'cross' (v. 20; cf. 2:14)."

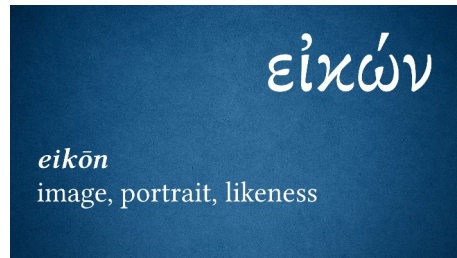
¹⁰ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 94: "In the canonical context, the word evokes Gen 1:27, where one reads, 'God created humankind in his own image' (NET). In other Pauline references to 'the image of God,' one also finds clear allusions to Genesis (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7; 15:45–49; 2 Cor 4:4)."

¹¹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 45: "That is why He could say, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). In Christ, the invisible God became visible, 'and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father' (John 1:14)."

¹³ He [i.e., God the Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So the “he” of **verse 15** is the “whom” of **verse 14**. And the “whom” of **verse 14** is the “beloved Son” of **verse 13**. Are you tracking with me? The “he” is the “whom,” who is the “Son,” who is Christ. Everyone got it? In other words, this is about Jesus. You knew that already, didn’t you?

Now what does it mean for Christ to be the image of the invisible God? The Greek word for “image” here is εἰκών (*eikōn*), from which we derive our English word “icon.”¹²



One of the reasons that idolatry, or even iconography, was so despicable to the Lord, is because the invisible God (God the Father) was not meant to be seen or displayed in any way by idols or images made by man. That’s a violation of the second commandment (**Exod 20:4**).

Also, the only legitimate manifestation of God’s image was to be found in man himself. We are the icon of God. We are made in his image. So iconography isn’t just the defilement of God; it’s the defilement of the true image of God, man.¹³

And in the same way that we are the children of God, and yet Jesus is the Son of God, Paul is saying here Christ Jesus is *the* Image of the invisible God.¹⁴ He’s the Perfect One!¹⁵ He’s the embodiment of all that humanity was supposed to be.¹⁶

And yet, he’s greater than that, because he is “God enfleshed” (**John 1:1–18**). He is the God-man, in ways that we will never be. The author of **Hebrews** says it this way, “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” (**Heb 1:3**).

And Paul says in **Romans** that we are actually conformed to Christ’s image when we get saved. “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” (**Rom 8:29**).

¹² Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 117: “‘Image’ is the name given to the statue that Nebuchadnezzar has erected in Daniel; and in Revelation, for instance, the word occurs ten times to refer to the ‘image’ of the ‘beast’ who seeks to displace God. Related to this usage is the application of the word to the stamped portrait of Caesar found on many first-century coins (e.g., Matt. 22:20 par. Mark 12:16 par. Luke 20:24).”

¹³ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 45: “Unlike man, Jesus Christ is the perfect, absolutely accurate image of God.”

¹⁴ HULDRYCH ZWINGLI: By image it means the *exact* image. That is, he resembles the Father in everything, and not merely like an engraving or a picture... He is the firstborn of creation. That is, the Son of God is before all creatures, but nevertheless, he is not to be numbered among created beings... For all things are created *in him*. Created things are made by another—and because this would indicate a defect in relation to Christ, it therefore does not apply to him.” Quoted in Graybill, *Philippians, Colossians: New Testament*, RCS, 153.

¹⁵ PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: “He is also the image, because he is the Word. For just as words are used by us as representations of realities, so the Son is the true likeness of the Father.” Quoted in Graybill, *Philippians, Colossians: New Testament*, RCS, 151.

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 45: “Although man is also the *eikōn* of God (1 Cor. 11:7; cf. Gen. 1:26–27), man is not a perfect image of God. Humans are made in God’s image in that they have rational personality. Like God, they possess intellect, emotion, and will, by which they are able to think, feel, and choose. We humans are not, however, in God’s image morally, because He is holy, and we are sinful. Nor are we created in His image essentially. We do not possess His incommunicable attributes, such as omniscience, omnipotence, immutability, or omnipresence. We are human, not divine.”

If we are made in the image of God, and Christ Jesus *is the Image* of the invisible God, why do we need to be conformed to the image of the Son? The answer is, because we have been marred. We are fallen and broken. And Christ is perfect, and he restores us. Paul talks about this later in **Colossians** when he tells them, “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image [εικόων] of its creator” (**Col 3:10**).¹⁷

In other words, Christ Jesus, the Image of the invisible God, has restored our status as image-bearers. We might call that justification. But also Christ Jesus, the Image of the invisible God is currently restoring our identity as image-bearers every day. We might call that sanctification. As we put off the old man, and put on the new, we are aspiring to be like the Perfect Image-bearer, Christ.

Write this down as a second description of Christ in the Christ-hymn. He is...

2) The **Firstborn** of All Creation (1:15b)¹⁸

Paul says,

¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all*¹⁹ *creation.*

What does that mean that Jesus is “the firstborn of all creation?”²⁰ **You’d better have that down. Because the JWs will make a mockery of this when they come knocking on your door. They will come and, unbeknownst to you, blaspheme your Savior. And they’re going to tie you up in knots unless you know what this passage means.**

Let me explain first what it doesn’t mean. It doesn’t mean that Jesus was literally born of God as if God the Father literally fathered or sired Jesus. To conclude that is to torture the metaphor, and to project something human on the eternal God of the universe. **Don’t do that. Don’t let the JWs do that.**

Actually, it’s worse than that. It’s heresy. And I don’t use that “h-word” lightly. I don’t like to throw that around indiscriminately. God the Son cannot be literally born of God or created by God the Father, because God the Son created all things, as we will see in the next section of this passage.²¹

The Greek word here for “firstborn” is πρωτότοκος (*prō-to-to-kos*).²²

¹⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Colossians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 45: “When someone puts faith in Christ, however, that person is promised that the image of God will be restored in him or her.”

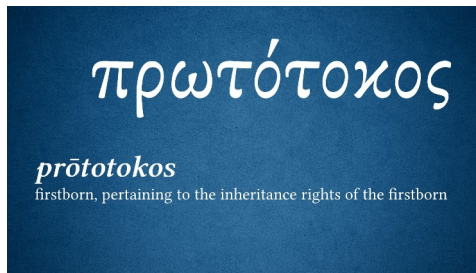
¹⁸ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 31: “As ‘image’ emphasizes Christ’s relationship to the Father, ‘the firstborn over all creation’ introduces his relationship to creation. Here also he is supreme.”

¹⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 111: “The word *pas* (variously translated ‘all,’ ‘every,’ ‘each’), occurring eight times in these verses, is the thread that binds the verses together. Whatever precise form the false teaching at Colossae took, it is at least clear that it was tending to question Christ’s exclusive role in providing spiritual growth and security, and, thereby, his exclusive role in the universe at large (see, e.g., 2:9–10, 19). The false teachers, it appears, argued from cosmology to spirituality: because the universe was filled with spiritual powers of various sorts, ultimate spiritual ‘fullness’ could be achieved only by taking them all into consideration (see esp. Paul’s counterargument in 2:14–15). Thus Paul in the hymn places particular emphasis on the supremacy of Christ—in both creation and redemption—over the powers (vv. 16, 20).”

²⁰ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 31: “while ‘firstborn’ can mean first child, it very often is simply a term which means ‘first in rank or honor.’”

²¹ AMBROSE: “If, indeed, there was anything in existence before the Son, then it instantly follows that all things in heaven and earth were not created in him, and the apostle is shown to have erred in so setting it down in his epistle.” Quoted in Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 15–16.

²² Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 31: “‘Firstborn’ was a code word for the coming Messiah, as in Psalm 89:27—‘I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.’”



And that word doesn't mean the "first created one."²³ If Paul wanted to say "first created," he would have used a different Greek word. He would have used the word πρωτόκτιστος (*prō-tok-ti-stos*)—"first created." But he doesn't say πρωτόκτιστος (*prō-tok-ti-stos*)!²⁴ He says πρωτότοκος (*prō-to-to-kos*), meaning "firstborn."²⁵ And *that* word (πρωτότοκος [*prō-to-to-kos*]), in *this* context, signifies that God the Son is the *Inheritor* of all that is God the Father's, like a firstborn son in the ancient world inherited all that belonged to his father.²⁶

This is a statement about the Son's supremacy. It's a statement about the Son's legitimacy as an heir. It's a statement about the Son's superiority. **Again, we are inheritors as Christians. We are heirs to an eternal inheritance. But that derives from the Son. Our inheritance is contingent on our connection to the Son.**

We are image-bearers, but we are not *the* Image of the invisible God. We are children of God, but not *the* Son of God. And we are heirs, but we are not *the* Heir Apparent. That right belongs to the Firstborn of all creation. It's the difference between capital letters and lowercase letters. And that's a big difference! We are heirs, because Christ Jesus is the Inheritor of all that belongs to God the Father.

Because everything that we have as Christians is dependent on us being "in Christ." It's all derivative. It's all contingent on our connection to him. That's why "in Christ" is the most important propositional phrase in the book of Colossians. Everything that we have, we have "in Christ."

Write this down as a third statement about Jesus. He is...

3) The **Agent** of Creation (1:16)

I'm choosing my words this morning very precisely. I hope you can sense that.

Paul says in **verse 16**,

¹⁶ For by him

By whom? Well, the "him" is the "he" is the "whom" is the "Son" is the "Christ." This Christ-hymn from start to finish is all about Jesus.

In fact, every single pronoun in these six verses refers to Jesus. There are eleven of them, by the way. Eleven pronouns! And all eleven refer to Christ. **Sometime this week, you should read through this passage from start to finish and just exchange every pronoun for "Jesus." And feel the weightiness of these statements about Jesus.**

²³ AMBROSE: "Firstborn, mark you, not first created." Quoted in Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 13.

²⁴ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 46.

²⁵ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 46: "Although *prōtotokos* can mean firstborn chronologically (Luke 2:7), it refers primarily to position, or rank. In both Greek and Jewish culture, the firstborn was the son who had the right of inheritance. He was not necessarily the first one born. Although Esau was born first chronologically, it was Jacob who was the "firstborn" and received the inheritance. Jesus is the One with the right to the inheritance of all creation (cf. Heb. 1:2; Rev. 5:1–7, 13)."

²⁶ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 95: "David (and the messianic Davidic ruler) is considered to be the 'firstborn,' although David himself was the youngest among his brothers (1 Sam 16:11)."

¹⁶ For by him [by Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth,²⁷ visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities²⁸—all things were created through him and for him.²⁹

Now for the Colossians, this statement might have come as quite a shock. Because when they look at the book of Genesis in the OT, they don't see the name "Jesus" anywhere creating the universe. Instead they see *Elohim* in **Genesis 1**. And they see *Yahweh Elohim* in **Genesis 2**. And Paul is connecting Jesus to *Elohim* here, which is really just the plural form of the word "God" in Hebrew (translated "God" or "gods"). But Paul is also connecting Jesus more particularly to Yahweh or *Yahweh Elohim*.

Some of you savvy Bible readers know that **Genesis 1:26** has a mysterious "us" statement—"Let **us** make man in **our** own image." Who is the "us" of that statement? **Is that the royal "we?"** Is that a plural of majesty? I don't think so. There is a plurality in unity in the Godhead that dates back to the very beginning of Scripture, the first chapter of the OT. In fact, it dates back to eternity past. There has *always been*, and there will *always be*, an "us" that is intrinsic to the Trinity.

John's Gospel makes this clear. "In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (**John 1:1**). How can Jesus be both God and with God? **I can either be Tony Caffey, or I can be with Tony Caffey. But I can't be Tony Caffey and also be with Tony Caffey!**

How does this make sense for God? The answer, as I've argued before, is the Trinity.³⁰ At the beginning of time, God the Son was both God and with God (i.e., God the Father). And the work of creation was a Trinitarian activity. God the Father created all things through the agency of his Son. That's the force of that statement "by him" in **verse 16**.

Everyone see that in **verse 16**? This is not "in Christ" this time, but "by Christ."

¹⁶ For by him all things were created,

That's a divine passive there in **verse 16**—"were created." Who were they created by? I would say God the Father created all things *by* or *through* the agency of God the Son.³¹ Paul doubles down on this a few words later when he says, "all things were created through him."

²⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 121: "'Heaven and earth' is a common biblical merism, that is, a construction in which two elements function together to indicate a single whole: in this case, the created order, the universe (e.g., Gen. 1:1, *passim*)."

²⁸ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 92: "The 'thrones' are assuredly to be located in heaven (cf. Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:4; though cf. Wis. 7:8), not least because the word is used for heavenly beings in *Testament of Levi* 3:8 (in the seventh heaven, with 'authorities'); *2 Enoch* 20:1; and *Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:10–11. Likewise the 'dominions' (κυριότητες) are almost certainly to be taken as referring to heavenly powers, in the light of Eph. 1:20–21 (also *1 Enoch* 61:10 and *2 Enoch* 20:1)."

²⁹ AUGUSTINE: "'Before Abraham I am'; that's what he said himself, the Gospel speaks. Listen to it, or read it. But that's little enough, being the creator before Abraham; he's the creator before Adam, creator before heaven and earth, before all the angels, and the whole spiritual creation, 'thrones, dominions, principalities and powers,' creator before all things whatsoever." Quoted in Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 16.

³⁰ Hamilton, *John–Acts*, ESVEC, 36: "Behold the mystery of the Trinity: within the one God are three persons sharing one nature forever. The Word was *with* God and the Word *was* God. Something so beautiful and glorious, so complex and simple, must be admired."

³¹ The preposition ἐν (*en*) can be translated "in" or "by" here. The question is whether the preposition, followed by a dative is being used instrumentally or spatially. Moo wants to be consistent with the use of ἐν, and leans spatially. Although he does say, "perhaps our problem is that we are seeking a specificity that Paul does not intend. He wants to make the very general point that all of God's creative work took place 'in terms of' or 'in reference to' Christ" (121). Even if the pronoun leans spatial instead of instrumental at the beginning of verse 16, the concept of agency is reinforced later when Paul writes "all things were created through him." This instrumental dative usage of the preposition διά (*dia*) correlates with other NT passages like John 1:3 and 1 Corinthians 8:3 where διά is used similarly to describe Christ's agency in creation.

This may have been a shocking revelation to the Colossians. Because they had these false teachers circulating in the church that were saying that angelic beings were supremely powerful. Maybe they should be worshipped! And maybe Jesus should just be put on par with the angels!³²

But Paul says strongly in **Colossians 2:18**, “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels.” **That’s what we might call an apostolic smackdown from the Apostle Paul.**

“Should we worship angels, Paul? Should we put them on par with Jesus.”

Paul responds to that by saying, **“No, no, no, no, no, no.” “NO! Angels are not on par with Jesus. In fact, they were created by Jesus!”**³³

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.³⁴

By the way, I used to read that statement about “thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” and think human thrones on earth. Maybe tangentially that’s what Paul is talking about.³⁵ But now I think he’s referencing Jewish angelic categories and a hierarchy that was prominent in first-century thinking.³⁶

The Jews viewed angels as a vast hierarchy of thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities. There were angels and archangels and cherubim and seraphim all the way up and down that hierarchy. And Paul is saying here, **“I don’t care how powerful you think an angel is or high-ranking he is, Jesus created all of them. And none of them compete with him. Don’t worship angels. Worship Jesus.”**³⁷

³² Keener, *The IVPBBCNT*, Col 1:16: “Many Jewish writers, including Philo, gave angels or subordinate divine powers a role in creation; other Jewish and Christian writers (like Paul) are prepared to combat that view, as here.”

³³ IRENAEUS: “It is the Father who made all things through him, whether visible or invisible, whether sensible or intelligible, whether temporal for the sake of some dispensation or eternal. These he did not make through angels or some powers that were separated from his thought.” Quoted in Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 14–5.

³⁴ Much is made about the parallels between Paul’s language in Colossians 1 and the language about wisdom in Proverbs 8. Is Christ the NT equivalent to Lady Wisdom? Dunn and others make much of this. But I’m dubious. See Tony Caffey, Messiah Bible Church, “Proverbs 8:1–36: The Better Way of Godly Wisdom,” January 21, 2024, <https://www.messiahbible.org/proverbs-8-1-36-the-better-way-of-godly-wisdom>.

For Moo’s part, he sees some connection to the Jewish wisdom tradition and the presentation of Jesus in Colossians 1, especially via Philo and his writings. But even Moo draws the line at some point: “And the final assertion in this verse about Christ’s relationship to creation, that *all things have been created ... for him*, goes beyond any Jewish tradition about wisdom” (Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 124). My question is why doesn’t Paul talk about wisdom or use the word for wisdom explicitly in this passage if he was connecting Jesus to Proverbs 8 and the Jewish wisdom tradition? If anything, there might be a polemic against that in this passage! Yes, Christ is wisdom personified, the perfect embodiment of wisdom. He is wisdom par excellence. Lady Wisdom may be typologically connected to him, but that’s about it. He is more than just a personified virtue of God. And Proverbs 8 asserts that wisdom was clearly created by God (see Prov 8:22). I’m comfortable with Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 92 and his conclusion: “It becomes clear that while wisdom traditions may provide lenses through which the significance of this hymn (and other passages in Colossians) can be appreciated, Paul also makes it clear that Jesus is not simply to be identified as Wisdom since he supersedes those ideas contained in such traditions.”

³⁵ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 92–93: “The fact that all four terms thus refer only to the invisible, heavenly realm and the repeated emphasis on Christ’s supremacy and triumph over the ‘principalities and powers’ in 2:10 and 15 do therefore strengthen the likelihood that the two lines were inserted by the author(s) of the letter, sacrificing the balance of the hymn in order to add a further reference to Christ’s superiority over all beings in heaven as well as on earth.”

³⁶ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 31: “The Scriptures and Jewish literature reveal that the four descriptions ‘thrones ... powers ... rulers ... authorities’ refer to four classes of angelic powers, with the last two referring to the highest orders of the angelic realm.”

³⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 122–3: “Also disputed is whether the four titles refer to all spiritual beings (e.g., angels, both good and bad) or to evil spiritual beings only. It is certainly the case that 1:20 and 2:15 imply hostility toward God and/or humans on the part of the powers; but the inclusive language of this verse suggests that Paul is setting up that specific point by asserting Christ’s supremacy over the entire angelic realm.”

And I would just say, church, we don't worship "saints" or venerate them or burn incense to them. That's idolatrous. And it's superstitious. And we don't worship Mary, the mother of Jesus. And we don't worship the Apostles. We don't worship any men or women apart from Christ.

And by the way, it's not the angels' fault that people in Colossae were tempted to worship them (unless we are talking about demonic angels). Remember when John mistakenly started to worship the angel in Revelation (19:10; 22:8–9). The angel was mortified. He rebuked John, "Get up. Don't worship me." It was an honest mistake by the Apostle John. And if the Colossians were tempted that direction, Paul is giving them a warning here.

And also, it's not Mary's fault that people in our day worship her. She didn't ask for that. She'd be appalled by that.

Who do we worship? We worship God and God alone. Let me quote the Ten Commandments for you again. "You shall have no other gods [Elohim] before me" (Exod 20:3). We worship *Yahweh Elohim* alone. We worship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

Write this down as a fourth description of Christ in the Christ-hymn. He is...

4) The **Preexistent** Son of God (1:17)

Paul says in verse 17,

¹⁷ And he is before³⁸ all things, and in him³⁹ all things hold⁴⁰ together.⁴¹

Jesus was not created. Jesus was before all things.⁴² Jesus existed in eternity past with God the Father and God the Spirit. He is eternally the Son. He is eternally God, just like God the Father is eternally God.

In the fourth century, the church fathers battled the Arians (the precursor to the JW's) over the minutest points of doctrine and Christology. And they fought over the nature of Christ. Is Christ ὁμοούσιος [*homoousios*] with the Father? Or is he ὁμοιούσιος [*homoiousios*] with the Father? Is he the "same essence" as the Father (ὁμοούσιος)? Or is he "similar essence" (ὁμοιούσιος)? The difference between those two Greek words is one letter—one iota. What a difference one letter makes!

The Nicene Creed (AD 325) reads as follows, **"Jesus is God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [ὁμοούσιος] with the Father."**⁴³ The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity says that God the Son

³⁸ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 47: "Christ existed before anything else was created (cf. Micah 5:2)."

³⁹ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 91: "The 'in him' is the beginning of a sequence of prepositional phrases by means of which the creation of 'all things' is described: 'in him, through him, to him.' Such use of the prepositions 'from,' 'by,' 'through,' 'in,' and 'to' or 'for' was widespread in talking about God and the cosmos."

⁴⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 125: "The verb here (*synestēken*, from *synistēmi*) means, in this context, 'hold together,' 'cohere,' and the use of the perfect tense suggests a stative idea: the universe owes its continuing coherence to Christ." Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 32: "The perfect tense here tells us that he continues now to hold all things together, and that apart from his continuous activity, all would disintegrate."

⁴¹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 125–6: "What holds the universe together is not an idea or a virtue, but a person: the resurrected Christ. Without him, electrons would not continue to circle nuclei, gravity would cease to work, the planets would not stay in their orbits."

⁴² Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 125: "The claim that Christ is *before all things* is somewhat ambiguous in English and even more so in Greek, where the preposition *pro* can designate either priority in time (e.g., Eph. 1:4, 'before the foundation of the world') or priority in rank (e.g., 1 Pet. 4:8, 'above all'). But the latter usage is quite rare in the New Testament, while all of Paul's uses of the word have a temporal sense. So this text is best taken as referring to Christ's preexistence."

⁴³ So Jesus, God the Son, is equal in essence with God the Father. They are ὁμοούσιος [*homoousios*] (one in being or same in essence) not ὁμοιούσιος [*homoiousios*] ("similar in essence"). The church fathers hammered this out at the Council of Nicaea. There's a huge difference between those words. What a difference a letter makes! But it's not as if they decided something novel at the Council of Nicaea. They just confirmed what Jesus says in John 5, that he is equal and of the same essence as the Father. And John 8:58

is ὁμοούσιος [*homoousios*] with the Father. He is of the same substance or essence.⁴⁴ He's not ὁμοιούσιος [*homoiousios*]. He is not of a similar substance. And those church fathers, in accurate interpretation of the Scriptures, determined that Christ was ὁμοούσιος (the same essence) as the Father. And they denounced as heretical the Arians and anyone who would say less of Christ than they should.

Look, if you don't believe in a preexistent Son of God, then you don't believe in the God of the Bible. And you don't hold to Christian orthodoxy. You might be ignorant about this, and still be a Christian. But you can't deny this and still be considered a Christian.

In fact, I think the Colossians may have been ignorant about this. That's why Paul is writing to them. He's telling them, **"Your view of Christ is too low! Let me tell you about Christ!"**⁴⁵

Notice also that Jesus holds all things together. He isn't just before all things; he holds all things together.⁴⁶ Our massive, intricate, and surprisingly fragile universe is held together by the power of our cosmic Savior.

John MacArthur writes, "The sheer size of the universe is staggering. The sun, for example, has a diameter of 864,000 miles (one hundred times that of earth's) and could hold 1.3 million planets the size of earth inside it. The star Betelgeuse, however, has a diameter of 100 million miles, which is larger than the earth's orbit around the sun. It takes sunlight, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, about 8.5 minutes to reach earth. Yet that same light would take more than four years to reach the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, some 24 trillion miles from earth. The galaxy to which our sun belongs, the Milky Way, contains hundreds of billions of stars. And astronomers estimate there are millions, or even billions of galaxies. What they can see leads them to estimate the number of stars in the universe at 10^{25} . That is roughly the number of all the grains of sand on all the world's beaches... The universe also bears witness to the tremendous wisdom and knowledge of its Creator. Scientists now speak of the Anthropic Principle, 'which states that the universe appears to be carefully designed for the well-being of mankind' (Donald B. DeYoung, "Design in Nature: The Anthropic Principle," *Impact*, no. 149 [November 1985]: p. ii). A change in the rate of Earth's rotation around the sun or on its axis would be catastrophic. The Earth would become either too hot or too cold to support life. If the moon were much nearer to the Earth, huge tides would inundate the continents. A change in the composition of the gases that make up our atmosphere would also be fatal to life. A slight change in the mass of the proton would result in the dissolution of hydrogen atoms. That would result in the destruction of the universe, because hydrogen is its dominant element."⁴⁷ The creation gives testimony to the intelligence of its Creator. Its creator is God. And God the Son holds it all together.

Do you think that might have an impact on the way that you sing worship songs on Sunday morning? Do you think that might have an impact on the way that you perceive Christ Jesus, your Lord and Savior? Is this how you envision Jesus, your Savior?

communicates similarly, "Before Abraham was I am."

⁴⁴ GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: "He is called 'image' because he is of one substance with the Father; he stems from the Father and not the Father from him, it being the nature of an image to copy the original and to be named after it. But there is more to it than this. The ordinary image is a motionless copy of a moving being. Here we have a living image of a living being, indistinguishable from its original to a higher degree than Seth from Adam and any earthly offspring from its parents." Quoted in Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 11.

⁴⁵ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 33: "Seeing Christ as he is will keep us from heresy, for it will steel us against a scaled-down Christ which has captured so many lost hearts. And it will cause us to begin to love him with a real love."

⁴⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 49: "He maintains the delicate balance necessary to life's existence. He quite literally holds all things together. He is the power behind every consistency in the universe. He is gravity and centrifugal and centripetal force. He is the One who keeps all the entities in space in their motion. He is the energy of the universe."

⁴⁷ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 47-8.

Write this down as a fifth statement about Christ. He is...

5) The **Head** of the Church (1:18a)

Paul says in **verse 18**,

⁴⁸ *And he is the head of the body, the church.*⁴⁸

This is a pretty amazing and surprising statement.⁴⁹ Paul just got done talking about how Christ is the supreme power in the universe. And now he moves from the cosmic to the local. He moves from the power over the universe to the power over the church. If there was any doubt in Colossae about who has ultimate authority over their church, Paul addresses that now with laser focus—Christ is the head of the church!⁵⁰

I won't belabor this point. Paul doesn't in **verse 18**. **I've told you before that Christ Jesus is the senior pastor of this church. He's the Elder over Messiah Bible Church.** He's the Chief Shepherd; we are his under-shepherds. We are nothing more than his caretakers and stewards. **And if we screw this up, we will be answerable to him, the head of the church.**

And he's not just the head of this local church, he's the head of every church, even the church universal.⁵¹ Without Christ, there is no church. Without Christ there is no redemption. Without Christ there is no salvation. Without Christ there is no reason to gather and worship.

I heard once about this group of Atheists that got together and tried to imitate a church gathering. They didn't believe in God. And they didn't want to be Christians. But they liked the idea of gathering and singing songs and being together like Christians do. I guess "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

But when I heard about that, I started to wonder, "What songs are they singing?" "Our God is not an awesome God." "It is not well with my soul." "Blessed assurance, we're all going to die! The earth is going to burn up in one billion years!" Who's going to Hallelujah that?

Look, when we gather as the church on Sunday mornings, it's all about Jesus. Without him, there's no reason to gather. Without him, there's no hope for the future. Without him, there's no salvation. Without Christ, there is no *Christ-ianity*. And without the head of the church, there is no church.

That's why it's so ridiculous when liberal churches deviate from Christ or from orthodox Christian doctrine. You are essentially taking an axe to the base of your own tree.

Write this down as a sixth description of Christ in the Christ-hymn. He is...

6) The **Firstborn** from the Dead (1:18b)⁵²

⁴⁸ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 99: "As Paul affirms Christ's supremacy over the community of believers, the attention shifts from the cosmos to the church, and from creation to redemption. Because Christ is supreme over all creation (vv. 15–17), he is also the head of the church."

⁴⁹ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC, 96: "The assertion of 1:18a does not evacuate the cosmic claims of 1:15–17 of their christological significance: to assert that Christ is head of the church does not narrow his cosmic mediatorial role; rather, it expands the significance of the claims made for the church."

⁵⁰ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 51: "The church is a Body, and Christ is the head of the Body. This concept is not used in the sense of the head of a company, but rather looks at the church as a living organism, inseparably tied together by the living Christ."

⁵¹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 99–100: "In this context, this 'church' is the 'universal church,' which includes all who belong to Christ. In the earlier writings of Paul, the church is portrayed as the body of Christ (Rom p 100 12:4–5; 1 Cor 12:12–30), but it is only in Colossians and Ephesians that one finds Christ as the head of the church (cf. Eph 4:15; 5:23)."

⁵² Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 129: "In the roughly parallel v. 15, 'firstborn' (*prōtotokos*), we have argued, refers to Jesus' supreme rank over all the created world. There may be some allusion to the same idea here in v. 18, but clearly

Paul says in verse 18b,

¹⁸ ... He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,⁵³

Paul uses the same word here that he did in verse 15 for “firstborn” (πρωτότοκος). But the description here is different. He’s not described as the “firstborn of all creation” but “firstborn from the dead,” which means that he is the first and preeminent one who was raised from the dead.⁵⁴

I would liken this description to what Paul says about firstfruits in 1 Corinthians 15. He’s the firstfruits of our own resurrection. His resurrection body will be like ours. His resurrection assures our own future resurrection.⁵⁵

And that’s because he’s “the beginning.” Everything begins and ends with him. He is the alpha and the omega, as John says about him in Revelation. He’s the beginning and the end (see Rev 1:17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13).

The famous Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (reigned AD 161–180) reportedly hired a servant to walk behind him and whisper in his ear, *memento mori*... literally translated, “Remember, to die.”

We might paraphrase this as follows, “Remember your mortality, Marcus.” “Remember, you’re just a man.” Marcus Aurelius needed that reminder. We need that reminder—*memento mori*. But nobody whispers that to Christ Jesus... because it’s not true! He is not, never was, and never will be “just a man.”

Yes, he died. But his death defeated death. And he is the firstborn from the dead.

And as a logical outworking of that, here’s a seventh description of Christ. He is...

7) The **Preeminent** One (1:18c-19)

Paul says in verse 18,

¹⁸ ... He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God⁵⁶ was pleased to dwell,

The descriptions here are moving from the rarefied air of Christ’s identity as God and part of the Godhead to his identity as the supreme and preeminent Son of Man. In other words, Paul goes from

the focus is now on temporal priority. But the word may have more than a simply temporal nuance... he is not only the first one to experience resurrection; he is the ‘founder’ of the new order of resurrection (see the remarks above on Gen. 49:3). He is the ‘firstborn (*prōtotokos*) among many brothers and sisters.’”

⁵³ ATHANASIUS: “Not then because he was from the Father was he called ‘Firstborn,’ but because in him the creation came to be; and as before the creation he was the Son, through whom was the creation, so also before he was called the Firstborn of the whole creation, the Word himself was with God and the Word was God. ... If then the Word also were one of the creatures, Scripture would have said of him also that he was Firstborn of other creatures; but in fact, the saints’ saying that he is ‘Firstborn of the whole creation’ demonstrates that the Son of God is other than the whole creation and not a creature.... He is called ‘Firstborn among many brothers’ because of the relationship of the flesh, and ‘Firstborn from the dead’ because the resurrection of the dead is from him and after him.” Quoted in Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ACCS, 13.

⁵⁴ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT, 101: “To be ‘the firstborn from the dead’ is to affirm that he is ‘the first to rise from the dead’ (Acts 26:23a).”

⁵⁵ GASPARO CONTARINI: “Many rose from the dead prior to Christ, including Lazarus, whom Christ himself raised. But they all rose to a mortal life, and they would all die again. Christ alone was raised to an immortal life over which death has no dominion. This is unprecedented.” Quoted in Graybill, *Philippians, Colossians: New Testament*, RCS, 155.

⁵⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 132–3: “The claim that all the fullness ‘was pleased to dwell in him’ probably echoes Old Testament descriptions of God ‘dwelling’ in the temple. See especially Psalm 68:16, which describes the temple mount: ‘God has been pleased to dwell in it’ (my trans. from the LXX [67:17]). In a typical New Testament emphasis, Christ replaces the temple as the ‘place’ where God now dwells.”

transcendence to immanence. He goes from Christ's deity to his humanity. And that movement will become clear in the final verse where Christ's humanity was necessary for salvation.

But the statements here in **verses 18 and 19** are statements about the God enfleshed. He died. He actually died. That's not possible with God the Father. It was possible with God the Son, because he was enfleshed. And that was purposeful. He did that to defeat death. He did that to rise from the dead, and therefore he became preeminent.⁵⁷

And yet through all of that, through all of the incarnation, Jesus's birth, his life, his death, Jesus never stopped being God.

Look again at **verse 19**.

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

Jesus didn't set aside his deity when he became man. Instead, he added humanity to his deity. We call this the incarnation. We call this the hypostatic union. Jesus became the God-man. And the fullness of God dwelt in bodily form.⁵⁸ He was Emmanuel—God with us.

By the way, the word for "preeminent" here is actually a verb in Greek. It means literally, "to be first" or "to have first place." No human being ever competes with Jesus. No one ever takes his place or becomes perfectly like him. He is and will always be preeminent.

This word "fullness" here was later used by Gnostics to describe these little bits of "God" that would float down to the earth and be deposited in human beings.⁵⁹ Thus people would be partially deified. That kind of teaching may have even circulated (in germ form) to the Colossians. If so, Paul is countering that here. All the fullness of God dwells in him. He gets all of it. Only he is deity, and only he is deified.

Look, one day we will receive glorified bodies. And we will be, in a sense, glorified. But we will never be deified. That never happens. We will never be gods. But we will be God's. We will never become gods. But we do belong to God. And God is happy to share his kingdom with us. But he will not share his Godship. That is reserved for Father, Son, and Spirit.

Some people think that we will become gods in heaven. That's not true. And some people think that we will become angels in heaven after we die. I hear that at funerals sometimes. I don't know where that comes from. That's not true either. The fullness of God will dwell in Christ Jesus, in bodily form, forever. The end. **We will share Christ's kingdom forever. But we will not share in his Godship.**

And why does the fullness of God dwell in human form in Christ? In other words, why the incarnation? Why didn't Jesus just stay the preincarnate Son of God forever? Why dwell in human form? Why come to this earth as a human?

Here's why. Because Jesus is...

⁵⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 128: "Against people who were arguing that ultimate spiritual experience had to be found in places in addition to Christ, Paul holds up Christ as the one who is the true and only source of life for the body. Just as Christ is preeminent in the universe, so he is preeminent within the new creation, the assembly of new covenant believers. But there is this difference: as the metaphor of body and head implies, Christ is in organic relationship to his people in a way that is not true of the creation in general."

⁵⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 132: "We might surmise, then, that the false teachers in Colossae were inviting the Christians there to experience true 'fullness' by following their philosophy (2:8) and rules (cf. 2:16–23); to which Paul responds: the 'fullness' that you are seeking is to be found in Christ."

⁵⁹ MacArthur, *Colossians*, MNTC, 52: "*Plērōma* (fulness) was a term used by the later Gnostics to refer to the divine powers and attributes, which they believed were divided among the various emanations. That is likely the sense in which the Colossian errorists used the term. Paul counters that false teaching by stating that all the fulness of deity is not spread out in small doses to a group of spirits, but fully dwells in Christ alone (cf. 2:9)."

8) The **Peacemaker** (1:20)

Paul says in **verse 20**,

²⁰ and through him to reconcile⁶⁰ to himself all things,⁶¹ whether on earth or in heaven, making peace⁶² by the blood of his cross.⁶³

Now we're going to talk in more depth next week about this work of reconciliation that Jesus accomplishes.⁶⁴ **I don't want to shoot all my bullets right now. But I do want to say this. The peace that we have with God is made possible by blood. No blood, no peace. No sacrifice on the cross, no salvation.**

Why did Jesus leave his throne in heaven to come to this world? He didn't leave his deity behind. He took that with him. But he did leave something behind, for a while. His exalted status was left behind, for a time. The glory and the comfort of his eternal status as the Son of God was left behind, for a season anyway.

This is how Paul says it elsewhere, "Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6–8). Jesus didn't leave his deity behind, but he did leave something behind in the incarnation. If nothing else, he left his dignity behind, as he allowed himself to be stripped and whipped and humiliated by the very men that he himself created.

Why would the Son of God do this? Why would he allow this? Why would God the Father allow this? Why would this person, the second person of the Trinity, the one whom Paul describes with such beautiful and grandiose language in **Colossians 1:15–18** allow **Colossians 1:19–20**? The incarnation? The humiliation of the cross? The crucifixion? The blood shed for reconciliation?

Why? Why, why, why, why, why? Here's the reason why. Because he loves us. Stupid and pathetic creatures that we are, Christ loves us. And there was no other way. There was no other way to save us from our sins apart from the blood shed at Calvary. And through that blood we have peace with God through Christ Jesus, our Lord. That'll make you sing songs a little differently on Sunday mornings. That'll put a little oomph in your worship. That'll make you think about communion differently.

Who is Jesus? Who is he? Is he some random carpenter in the first-century world that a few lowly fishermen made more of than they should have? Is he some enigmatic teacher who put the Pharisees and the Romans in their place? A defier of the status quo? A socialist liberator of the people?

⁶⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 134: "In speaking of the reconciliation of all things to Christ, the 'hymn' presupposes that the Lordship of Christ over all things (vv. 15–18) has somehow been disrupted. Though created through him and for him, 'all things' no longer bear the relationship to their creator that they were intended to have. They are therefore in need of reconciliation."

⁶¹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 135: "Since at least the time of Origen, then, some interpreters have used this verse to argue for universal salvation: in the end, God will not (and often, it is suggested, *cannot*) allow anything to fall outside the scope of his saving love in Christ."

⁶² Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 136–7: "Through the work of Christ on the cross, God has brought his entire rebellious creation back under the rule of his sovereign power. Of course, this 'peace' is not yet fully established. The 'already/not yet' pattern of New Testament eschatology must be applied to Colossians 1:20."

⁶³ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC, 130: "Christ's supremacy is seen to be the result of his resurrection. This, of course, takes nothing away from the reality of Christ's eternal sovereignty over all creation (vv. 15–17). But it reflects the common New Testament understanding of Christ's resurrection as having established his power over a fallen and rebellious world in a new degree (Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:9–11)."

⁶⁴ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 38: "Our personal reconciliation took nothing less than the death of God's Son; but his death and its effects went far beyond any human death... Jesus bore the separation of sin so reconciliation could take place. He made 'peace through his blood, shed on the cross' (v. 20). '[H]e himself is our peace' (Ephesians 2:14). As Dorothy Sayers put it, 'Whatever the answer to the problem of evil, this much is true: God took His own medicine.'"

Or is he (1) The Image of the Invisible God, (2) The Firstborn of All Creation, (3) The Agent of Creation, (4) The Preexistent Son of God, (5) The Head of the Church, (6) The Firstborn from the Dead, (7) The Preeminent One and (8) The Peacemaker through his blood? Is he the Christ of the Christ-hymn of Colossians 1:15–20 or not?

Years ago, C.S. Lewis presented his famous trilemma in his book *Mere Christianity*.⁶⁵ And the trilemma goes like this. Jesus is either (1) a liar, (2) a lunatic, or (3) LORD. Every person has to make a determination about that.⁶⁶ What Christ *cannot be* is just a good, moral teacher. Either (1) he's lying about who he is. And Paul is lying too in Colossians 1. Or (2) he's crazy. He's a raving lunatic. And so is Paul, by the way. Only a crazy person would follow and worship a crazy person... and talk about him like this in Colossians 1:15–20.

Or here's the third option. (3) He's the Lord. He's the Lord of all! He's the Lord *of all*, or he is not Lord *at all!*⁶⁷

And if Jesus Christ is Lord of all... if he is who Paul says he is in this passage, then this is not someone you come to and say, "Okay, Jesus, thanks for saving me. But I've got wonderful plans for my life. I just need you to get on board with them." No! It doesn't work that way.⁶⁸

And by the way, we don't come to Jesus as the church and say, "Okay, Jesus, you are the head of the church. But we are the neck. And we're going to turn the head any way we want!"

No, we come to Jesus and we recognize him as Savior and Lord and we say, "Here I am, Lord. I am yours. Everything I am belongs to you. Use me for your purposes."⁶⁹

"Here's our church, Lord. Messiah Bible Church. You are the leader. You are the Lord. You are the Son of God. You are the Head of this church and every church. Use this church, Messiah Bible Church, for your glory and for your purposes."

Let's bow in a word of prayer and then we can take communion together.

⁶⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001).

⁶⁶ See the TGC article by Justin Taylor entitled, "Is C.S. Lewis's Liar-Lord-or-Lunatic Argument Unsound?", 02-01-16: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/is-c-s-lewiss-liar-lord-or-lunatic-argument-unsound/>

⁶⁷ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 30.

⁶⁸ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 32: "Everything began with him and will end with him. All things sprang forth at his command, and all things will return to him at his command... Since this is true, we should live completely for him. Any other course is completely *irrational* for the believer."

⁶⁹ Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon*, 33: "When we truly understand what is being said here, it is amazing that we should ever look anywhere else for meaning and purpose in life."