

## **The Supremacy of Christ** Romans 8:1-2 and Colossians 1:15-23

Songs: In Christ Alone: [In Christ Alone - Stuart Townend \(4vv\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

There is none like you: [THERE IS NONE LIKE YOU - Lenny LeBlanc \(with lyrics - 2015\) - YouTube](#)

From the hymn "In Christ alone". The first verse:

*"In Christ alone my hope is found  
He is my light, my strength, my song  
This cornerstone, this solid ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm  
What heights of love, what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease  
My comforter, my all in all  
Here, in the love of Christ, I stand.<sup>1</sup>*

Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians In AD 60–61, during his first imprisonment in Rome while awaiting trial. Colossians, together with Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon are known as the Prison Letters.

Paul had never visited Colossae<sup>2</sup>, a small city in the province whose capital was the grand Ephesus. Paul received a report from Epaphras, a convert of Paul's from his more than two-year ministry in Ephesus. Epaphras probably the founder and leader of the church in Colossae.<sup>3</sup> He had come to Rome to serve Paul and to bring him news of problems facing the Colossians.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the followers in Colossae were distracted by the belief that *"the air was thick with unseen spirits, that humans ignored at their peril."*<sup>5</sup>

Scrolls of spells for protecting against these powers were known as "Ephesian letters".

The false teachers were denying the deity of Jesus and devaluing the supremacy of Jesus and the adequacy of salvation through him.<sup>6</sup>

So, Paul wrote this letter to counter the teachings and to restore Jesus to the centre of the lives of his followers in Colossae.

The way Paul makes his argument is as significant as the argument he makes.<sup>7</sup>

Why was this necessary? Paul was writing to meet the situation facing the followers as described to him.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand our passage it is necessary to consider the situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Opening verse of the hymn "In Christ alone."

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 2:1.

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:7,4:12-13, Philemon1:23

<sup>4</sup> See this article: [Book of Colossians Overview - Insight for Living Ministries](#)

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Peterson in the introduction to Colossians in The Message. Scrolls of spells for protecting against these powers were known as "Ephesian letters."

<sup>6</sup> Introduction to Colossians in NIV Zondervan Study Bible at page 2425

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Peterson in the introduction to Colossians in The Message

<sup>8</sup> I draw on the book of William Barclay – The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians.

At that time there was a group called the Gnostics – the intellectual ones. The way they looked at the world was called Gnosticism<sup>9</sup>.

Barclay writes:

*“These people (the Gnostics) were dissatisfied with what they considered the unrefined simplicity of Christianity and wanted to ... align it with the other philosophies which were popular at the time.”*

They regarded that all matter was evil, and that it was out of this evil matter that the world was created. They believed that God was spirit and altogether good, so that true God could not touch evil matter and could not himself be the agent of creation. So, they envisaged beings and angels, so far removed from God that they could handle matter and create the world.<sup>10</sup> These beings were ignorant of, and hostile to, God. The Gnostics argued:

- firstly, that it was a power hostile to God that had created the world.
- secondly, that Jesus was by no means unique - he might be one among many but wasn't the highest.
- Thirdly that salvation was achieved by intellectual knowledge available only to a select group.

Paul, carefully but powerfully, counters these views.

Let us consider the argument that Paul makes. We do so in times where we face teachings that aim to detract from the identity, standing and teachings of Jesus.

The passage read for us this morning was Colossians 1:15-23.

We need to read this passage against the statement we find in verses 13 and 14:

*“For he (God) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

There were those in Colossae who feared that they were prisoners of sinister powers that surrounded them and who believed that they needed protection through means other than, or in addition to, Christ.

So, Paul confirms that they have been delivered from the dominions of darkness and redeemed.

Verses 15-20 contain what was an early Christian hymn. Using poetic language Paul confirms that Christ is not just one of many spiritual powers but is preeminent over all.

The first stanza (vv15-18a) proclaims Jesus as the pre-existent agent and regent of creation.

The second stanza (vv18b-20) confirms Jesus as the reconciler of all things, in heaven and on earth – every part of the created cosmos.

This passage starts with the words:

*“He, Jesus the Son, is the image of the invisible God.”*

God is unseen but has been made known through Jesus. In Hebrews Jesus is described as *“the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his being.”*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gnosticism (from Ancient Greek: γνωστικός, Romanised: gnōstikós, Koine Greek: [ɣnostiˈkos], 'having knowledge') is a collection of religious ideas and systems which coalesced in the late 1st century AD among Jewish and early Christian sects. These various groups emphasized personal spiritual knowledge (gnosis) above the orthodox teachings, traditions, and authority of religious institutions. Gnostic cosmogony generally presents a distinction between a supreme, hidden God and a malevolent lesser divinity (sometimes associated with the Yahweh of the Old Testament) who is responsible for creating the material universe. Consequently, Gnostics considered material existence flawed or evil, and held the principal element of salvation to be direct knowledge of the hidden divinity, attained via mystical or esoteric insight. Many Gnostic texts deal not in concepts of sin and repentance, but with illusion and enlightenment.

<sup>10</sup> Barclay page 132

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 1:3

John in his gospel wrote<sup>12</sup>:

*“<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”*

In Genesis we read that God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them.<sup>13</sup>

*“By using this word (image) of Jesus, Paul in effect says: “Look at this Jesus. He shows you not only what God is; he also shows you what you were meant to be.””*

Paul is confirming that the Colossians did not need secret knowledge or supplementary visions to understand God more fully. Christ is sufficient and no add-ons are needed.

Then we read that Jesus is *“the firstborn over all creation.”* This is a title of honour and not used in time sense. Paul is saying that the highest honour which creation holds, belongs to Jesus.

Barclay says: *“If we wish to keep the time sense and the honour sense combined, we may translate the phrase as “He was brought to birth before all creation.””*<sup>14</sup>

This to counter the Gnostic view that Jesus was just one of a line of beings and angels between God and the creation of the world.

Paul wants no doubt to be in the minds of the followers in Colossae.

*“<sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”*

Firstly, there is no ambiguity. It is in Jesus that all things were created. By God. Not by any evil power.

Secondly, it is God’s creation with Jesus as the agent of creation in the beginning, and the goal of creation in the end. Jesus, the alpha and the omega.<sup>15</sup>

And no doubt is left that this relates to all things. Seven times in six verses Paul mentions *“all creation,” “all things,” “everything.”*

Jesus is *“before all things.”* Christ before creation, and the key to unlock the meaning and purpose of the universe and what God has done, is doing, and will do.<sup>16</sup>

And Paul goes further: *“in him (Jesus) all things hold together.”* Jesus not only the beginning and the end of creation, but the power that holds it all together – all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

So far Paul has been talking of Jesus as the supreme ruler over the cosmos. In Hebrews we read that even the angels worship him.<sup>17</sup>

Now he turns to the church. *“And he is the head of the body, the church.”*

The body is directed and governed by the head. It draws its strength from the head.<sup>18</sup> The church is to take its lead from Jesus. It does not exist for its own sake: It exists to live and serve in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

The world is the creation of Christ, and the church is the new creation of Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> See John 1:18

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:26-7

<sup>14</sup> Barclay page 138

<sup>15</sup> [Revelation 1:8, 21:6-7, 22:13](#)

<sup>16</sup> Footnote in NIV Zondervan Study Bible page 2429.

<sup>17</sup> [Hebrews 1:6](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Colossians 2:19](#)

The Colossians are to take their lead from Jesus, and not from anyone teaching doctrine in conflict with the Gospel message, Gnostic or other.

And then Paul introduces a new dimension: *“he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,”*

Paul reminds the followers, and us, of the event that was at the centre of all thinking, belief and experience of the early church: the resurrection of Jesus.

This echoes what was written in 1 Corinthians<sup>19</sup> and Revelation<sup>20</sup>:

*<sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

*<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,*

Not just an historical figure, but Christ raised from the dead and our living saviour.

And for all these reasons, Paul writes: *“so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”*

Again, the reference to everything. Nothing excluded.

Barclay writes this:

*“So, there are four great facts about Jesus Christ in his relationship with the Church, which we can now put in order.*

- *He is the living Lord;*
- *He is the source and origin of the Church;*
- *He is the constant director of the Church; and*
- *He is the Lord of all, by virtue of his victory over death.”<sup>21</sup>*

This was pleasing to God and was God’s plan. *“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus (him).*

Paul uses the word *“fullness”*. *“Fullness”* was part of the vocabulary of the Gnostic philosophies. In those systems it meant the sum of the supernatural forces that the Gnostics believed controlled the fate of people.<sup>22</sup> Paul points out that the fullness of God dwells in Jesus.

And God was pleased to have *“all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, reconciled to himself.”*

God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to reconcile creation, men and women, and all things to himself.<sup>23</sup>

The object of Jesus coming was reconciliation, to bridge the separation caused by the fall. This was God’s initiative.

And the medium of reconciliation was *the blood on the cross: “by making peace through the blood of Jesus (his blood), shed on the cross.”*

In Chapter 2 of Colossians<sup>24</sup> Paul expands on this:

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20

<sup>20</sup> Revelation 1:5

<sup>21</sup> Barclay page 141

<sup>22</sup> Footnote NIV Study Bible page 1816

<sup>23</sup> John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

<sup>24</sup> Colossians 2:14-15

*“<sup>14</sup> having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*

The burden of our guilt taken away by the death of Jesus on the cross. The debt paid with no more condemnation<sup>25</sup>. Reconciliation with God, the separation from God broken.

And notice the words that Paul uses here. God has *“disarmed the powers and authorities ... triumphing over them by the cross.”* I mentioned that there was a teaching that *“the air was thick with unseen spirits, that humans ignored at their peril.”*

Paul’s readers now hear that the visible and invisible spiritual powers that they were being told to fear and revere had been disarmed and overcome. Paul systematically and clinically destroys the false teachings that were circulating in Colossae conveying the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of the gospel.

And we close by looking at verses 21-23.

Paul having made his argument then reminds the followers in Colossae, that they are hold to the gospel and not be distracted or diverted. He reminds them that the alienation from God caused by sin has been broken. Jesus has paid the price; the debt has been settled. The slate wiped clean and reconciliation with God achieved through the death of Jesus on the cross. This done for the believers, not through anything that they had done.

And the believers now, without blemish and free of accusation, can be presented holy in God’s sight. What are the believers to do? They are to continue in the faith, established and firm, and not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

The emphasis is on the gospel, the gospel heard by them and *“proclaimed to every creature under heaven.”* The gospel of which Paul stated he was a servant.

Paul urges the Colossians to understand the supremacy of Christ and what Christ has done for them.

Their faith is not to be Jesus and anything else, it is to be Jesus!

This message was a message to the Colossians but is also a timely message to us. I wonder what Paul would have written to the Trinitarians and the believers in 2022.

The thrust, I believe, would have been the same. Perhaps including what he had written earlier to those in Corinth:

*“<sup>3</sup> But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity (and purity) that is in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!*

Don’t do this! Look to the supremacy of Jesus and to the simplicity and purity of the true gospel. Ignore those who don’t deny Jesus but misrepresent him. Those who suggest Jesus was a great moral teacher but question whether he was really the son of God?<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Romans 8:1: There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

<sup>26</sup> “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [that is, Christ]: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.... You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But

Ignore those who suggest you need Jesus-and-secret knowledge, Jesus-and-this particular and limited experience, Jesus-and-secular power, Jesus-and- self empowerment. Jesus-and-politics, Jesus-and-...

My instruction to you is to delete the hyphens, the add-ons. You have been reconciled to God through the death of Christ. You are holy and blameless, the slate wiped clean. Continue to believe the truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.<sup>27</sup> The gospel is not over simplified, it is simply the best!

Christ alone!

No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny

No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from his hand  
'Til he returns or calls me home  
Here, in the power of Christ, I stand<sup>28</sup>

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let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

—C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity

<sup>27</sup> [Colossians 1:21-23 NLT](#)

<sup>28</sup> In Christ Alone – lyrics. Songwriters: Keith Getty, Stuart Townend. For non-commercial use only.