

Colossians 1:15-23

Introduction: Our family likes to play the game *Balderdash*. The idea is that you are given a word or a movie title or a name and you have to make up a definition for the word, or say what the movie is about, or tell who the person is. Example: Louise Greenfarb – Who is she? Now everyone gives her an identity. You can say whatever you want: She’s the owner of the world’s largest collection of refrigerator magnets; or that’s the real name of the 1920s movie actress Louise Brooks; the first president and founder of Einstein Bros Bagels; the author of books used to teach braille to blind children. Real answer: The magnet lady – Louise Greenfarb owns literally myriads of magnets. She’s in the Guinness Book of World records and has thousands of her magnets in the Guinness Records Museum in Las Vegas, where she happens to live. The point is that there is only one real Louise Greenfarb and I just made all the other ones up.

The world plays *Balderdash* with Jesus. People make things up about Him: He was a wandering, Jewish, cynic philosopher; he was a guru who practiced ancient eastern mysticism; he was the incarnation of Michael the Archangel; he was one of a long line of prophets that includes Abraham, Moses, David and Mohammed. These ideas all have consequences because in the end we may think we believe in Jesus, and yet end up having confused Him with a Jesus that someone simply made up. None of these fictional versions of Jesus are worthy of our worship. But if Jesus is really God incarnate, then our failure to acknowledge that might have eternal consequences. Today’s passage intends to clear this up.

We must worship the real Jesus – our Creator, the head of the church, who has reconciled us to God.

- I. Christ is our Creator. 1:15-17
- II. Christ is the head of the church. 1:18
- III. Christ has reconciled us to God. 1:19-23

- I. Christ is our Creator. 1:15-17

A. This is a recurring theme in the NT. Here are two parallel passages:

John 1:1-4 NKJV ¹*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

Hebrews 1:1-4 NKJV ¹*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.*

One commentator has put it like this:

“Christ is outside creation, prior to it, distinct from it, and He is sovereign to it all, for it was created by Him and indeed for Him. In Him the purpose of the universe is found, in Him is its principle of coherence, and it is He that ‘impresses upon creation that unity and solidarity which makes it a cosmos instead of a chaos’ (Lightfoot)”—Ashby (International Bible Commentary)

1:15 Contrast this to what's called the Arian view – still held today by JW's. They take "firstborn" to mean that Christ was a created being and not co-eternal with the Father – rather than a statement of His preeminence.

Image *eikōn* related to our word "icon". God clearly forbids the use of icons or images in worship, but it's not as if He doesn't understand our need to see what He is like.

A. God created the human race "in the image of God."

Gen 1:27 NKJV *So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

So one image we have of God is when we see people acting at their best.

B. Jesus, by means of the incarnation, allows us to see God in human form.

John 14:8-11 NKJV ⁸*Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."*

⁹*Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. ¹¹Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves."*

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II. Christ is the head of the church. 1:18

A. The church is body of Christ and Christ is the head of the church. This gives us an idea of the closeness or vital connection that exists between the church and Jesus Himself. When Paul was on the road to Damascus, still hating Christians and going there to arrest some of them to bring them to Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to him and said:

Acts 9:4-5 NKJV ³... *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."*

Jesus considered persecution of the church the same as persecution of Himself.

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III. Christ has reconciled us to God. 1:19-23

A. 1:19 **Fullness** meaning "full measure, abundance, full measure, completeness." Paul makes this even clearer in the next chapter:

Colossians 2:9 NKJV *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;*

Colossians 2:9 ESV *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,*

Colossians 2:9 NLT *For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.*

Jesus was in the unique position to reconcile us to God because He added a human nature to the Deity He already possessed.

- A. 1:20-22 Sin disrupted the original state of harmony or *shalom* that existed in the created realms. Christ's mission here on earth was to set that all straight. Through the blood of His cross He restored the peace, that state of *shalom*, that God first intended.
 - i. We were enemies, but now we have been reconciled to God.
 - ii. We were sinful, but Christ intends to present us "holy, blameless and above reproach in His sight."
 - a) This is what it means to be "justified by faith"

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- iii. If we look at our sin, we may wonder how that can ever happen. We need to trust in Jesus first and analyze it all later. Even if we never fully grasp the full scope of this idea, that's OK; it's OK to be amazed by God's grace.

Martin Luther explained it like this:

"You may wonder, 'How can I be holy since I sin and feel sinful?' Recognizing and feeling your sin is good. Thank God and don't despair. It's a step toward health whenever a sick person recognizes his disease. 'But how can I be freed from sin?' you wonder. Run to Christ, the Physician who heals the broken-hearted (Psalm 147:3). He makes sinners holy."

- B. 1:23 Here Paul cautions against an idea that is sometimes called *universalism*, or the belief that everyone will eventually be saved. Those who are truly saved are described in this verse.
 - i. Eternal life is a free gift to all who will accept it, so in one sense everyone on earth is eligible. It is not an exclusive message at that level.
 - ii. Notice the little word "if" at the beginning. If someone does not continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast in the hope of the gospel as taught clearly in Scripture, then Scripture has no assurance of salvation for that person. Certainly, the gospel is open to all people, but one has to accept the whole package of doctrine that this passage describes.
 - a) To reject the biblical Christ is to deny our very Creator.
 - b) To reject the biblical Christ is to reject the only One who, in enduring the cross and shedding His blood for us, has provided for our reconciliation.
 - c) To fall away from these beliefs is to reject the only means available by which we can be saved.

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Conclusion: The Supremacy of Christ

- If we believe Jesus is someone other than who He really is, we will deny Him the worship and complete devotion that He truly deserves. We're just playing a game of *Balderdash*. The problem is that our beliefs about Jesus have very real consequences.
- We have just examined one of the strongest statements about the deity of Christ in the Bible. Jesus is not only equal to God (Philippians 2:6); he is God (John 10:30, 38; 12:45; 14:1-11).
- Jesus not only has all authority, as the divine Son of Man, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He is the source of all authority here on earth.
- He not only reflects God, but he reveals God to us (John 1:18; 14:9).
- As to His deity, He came to earth from heaven He is not a purely created being as Adam was and we presently are (1 Corinthians 15:47). Therefore, He is Lord of all (Romans 9:5; 10:11-13; Revelation 1:5; 17:14).
- He is completely holy (Hebrews 7:26-28; 1 Peter 1:19; 2:22; 1 John 3:5), and he has authority to judge the world (Romans 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1).
- He is supreme over all creation, including the spirit world. (Colossians 1:16)
- This same Jesus died to save us from judgment and rose from the dead on the third day.
- We, like the Colossian believers, must believe in the Jesus that really is, the one defined by Scripture, or our Christian faith will be hollow and meaningless.
- Any system that does not acknowledge that Jesus is worthy of the highest possible worship and all the devotion or glory that we can humanly give Him is, in the end, sub-Christian – it is something less than the biblical faith.
- Any person who believes the right facts about Jesus, but does not personally trust Him in order to receive complete forgiveness and eternal life, remains unsaved even if that person's doctrinal understanding of Jesus is completely in line with biblical revelation.

(See The Handbook of Bible Application)

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we worship You. We acknowledge You as our Creator, the head of the church and the one who died to save us from our sins. As God, You deserve our complete devotion. You created all things and yet you came to this earth and died in order to save us. Lord, we invite you, in all things to have the preeminence in our lives. Please strengthen us by Your almighty power to continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which we have heard. And Lord please make us holy, blameless and above reproach in Your sight, that we might become the church that You truly deserve. Glorify Your name in our lives, Lord Jesus. Amen.