

The Fullness of God in Him, Part 1

Colossians 1:15-20

Please turn in your bibles to that first chapter of Colossians. There is a word of greeting from the apostle Paul. This is a church, by the way that he didn't start. It was actually one of his dear disciples that he evangelized that went and started the church in Colossae, all the churches in the Lycus valley like Laodicea, all through the Lycus valley, those churches were started by a man named Epaphras. Paul had never visited there and yet he wrote this letter because of great concern.

There's an opening section of greeting and then he gets right into a prayer report to speak of how he gives thanks for them. In the opening section there, verses 9-14, Paul describes his prayers of gratitude for this church. Reveals how he has been praying for them with specifics and in verse 11, if you'll look there, he blesses them he says, "May you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the father who has

qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Stop there, what is, what is “the inheritance of the saints in light?” It’s God; God is the inheritance of the saints. The saints inherit not mere riches and treasures, not power and influence, not even merely the heavens and the earth. Oh that’s all way too small. The saints, they inherit the maker of all that is. Amazing. Look at verse 13, this God our inheritance, he is the one who “has delivered us from the domain of darkness.” He’s, “transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Look, to know this God, to receive him as your inheritance, one must first be reconciled to him. One must first have his sins forgiven, completely taken away, so that the slate is wiped clean. Not only that, but we must not just be innocent or spotless before God, but also we must be perfect before God. That is we must fulfill all righteousness. Having fulfilled his perfect law, having perfectly conformed to his holiness. Impossible, you say, and you’re right about that. How am I,

filled with sin, going to be, have all my sins, how can I purge myself of all my sins? How can I completely fulfill a law that I've already broken? No one but God can conform to the holiness of God.

But that's the good news for these Colossian saints. The Gospel for them and for all of us is that what we cannot do, what is impossible for us, is possible with God. For God has accomplished this through his beloved Son. Incarnate in Jesus Christ, in Christ is our only hope. And now the problem for the Colossians, there are a number of influences from the surrounding culture that were distracting them from their devotion and simplicity of knowing and loving and worshipping Jesus Christ. It's not, like, unlike our own day. So many, many distractions in their world as there are in ours. And Paul wants these Colossians and he would have you and me as well beloved to refocus, to remove all distraction, to power down everything in your life that's trying to get in to your head, and devote ourselves instead to knowing and loving and worshipping Jesus Christ and him alone.

Sort of recapture their attention, to reset their focus, Paul writes the following words, look at verse 15. "He," that is the one in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins, "he is the image of the invisible God," he is, "the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authority, all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

Listen, if the assurance of your eternal condition, your eternal salvation, is guaranteed by the person described in that text you can have absolute unshakeable confidence that you have peace with God. No more to be plagued by sin. No more to be overcome by temptation. No more to be defiled in your conscience. No more to live in fear of judgment, of rejection,

of condemnation. No more to live in regret of what should have been and could have been but is not because you were not able.

Listen, no more need to live in fear of man. No more need to live in fear of his deceiving and confusing and all contradictory opinion. You do not have to worry that you're not able to follow the, the so called higher life of enlightened mystics. You don't have to concern yourself that you're outside the so called secret knowledge of any modern day Gnostic. No need to feel intimidated in the presence of those who are studied, and cultured, and lettered, and educated in modern philosophy and modern theory and modern science and all the rest.

Why? Because Jesus is the one in whom Colossians 2:3, he is the one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." You know what all means in that text? All means all, and that's all, all means. If you're his, and he is yours, then the vault of wisdom and knowledge is wide open to you. For Colossians 2:9 and 10, "In him the whole fullness of deity

dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”

Christ, since he is all surpassingly supreme, you can find in him all confidence, and assurance, and hope, and joy, and reason for gratitude. We are talking here about the greatest gift of all time. So Merry Christmas folks. This is the gift God gave the world. Which is known and enjoyed by all who believe the Gospel. Christ fully glorified God. That's what this text is teaching. So let's unwrap God's gift of his Son that's found in this passage by describing what makes Christ here all, so all surpassingly glorious, so worthy of all our praise. Which demands that we bow on our knees and worship him. We're going to look at just two points: Christ the creator and Christ the redeemer. Christ the creator and Christ the redeemer.

First point, let's consider the glory of God revealed in Christ the creator. The glory of God revealed in Christ the creator. The Son, as we see here in verses 15-17, the Son glorified God by creating the world and sustaining it. He glorified God by creating and sustaining the world. Let's start

in verse 15, it says "he is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation." The word, image, there, it's a word *eikon* which, which we get the word, icon, from. It can refer to what represents something else or what manifests something else. Surely both are true of Christ, representing and manifesting God, but the meaning here is manifestation. He is the image, he is the manifestation of the invisible God, Colossians 2:9 as we just read, "in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." So Jesus is an exact visible manifestation of an invisible God. And I hope that you see that is an incredible statement.

What is he saying here? Because it sounds logically contradictory to speak of making God, who is according to his essential nature, invisible. What does it mean to make him visible? That seems to meddle with one of God's essential attributes doesn't it, you see the problem right? If there is one single ever so slight of a change to the essential nature of God, just one micron of modification in the essential being of God, well then he ceases to be all that he is. If he, in his essential nature, is not invisible, he ceases to be God. How can Paul possibly say here that the Son brings God invisibility to

visibility. Well by virtue of creation, first of all. By virtue of creation. All creation from the farthest, largest, star to the nearest smallest atom, all creation reveals something about God.

As Paul writes in Romans 1:20, God's "invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made." The Son has made God known by creating and sustaining the world. For, verse 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." That's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? That's the point.

This is why the Son of God is called in verse 15 "the first born of all creation." Not the first one born, as in he's brought into existence through a womb, that's not the sense here. But preeminent one, first born being preeminent. It anticipates his incarnation. The word first born, is the word *prototokos* and it can refer to birth order in a literal sense.

But the literal sense provides for a, a metaphorical sense which is common use in the ancient world. It comes to us with immense, weighty theological significance and meaning.

The word first born, *prototokos*, refers to not just first birth order but all that's conveyed on and given to the first born in a family. So it's the status of the first born. David though the youngest of his family was called the first born of his family. All the status of the first born, the honor, the privilege of the first born, all the rights the privileges, the honor, the responsibility of the father, all of it, transferred without diminishment, without degradation, to the one given the status of the first born. That's what Paul is conveying here.

The Son is the image of the invisible God. Which gives him the highest privilege as the first born of all creation. Understand this, though mankind, in Genesis 1 and 2, mankind was created in God's image. God created him male and female. Adam and Eve created in his image, representative head over all of creation Adam was. And yet Adam and Eve fell into sin. Eve was tempted, Adam transgressed, knowingly transgressed. They

tarnished and distorted that image and everyone born in the likeness of Adam has been born into a tarnished and distorted image of God ever since. The remnants are there. We can recognize our creator, we still bare his image in many ways. Even fallen mankind does. But it wasn't until Jesus Christ, until he came in the flesh, that we saw in him without any diminishment, no distortion, no perversion, no degradation whatsoever. We saw in him the perfect image of God.

Many of you know that the men in this church have been getting together on Saturday mornings over the past year to study theology. We have learned and meditated on some incredible realities of God. We've rejoiced in those things, in fact I can't understand why all men in our church, if you're not working, you've got some family thing, why you're not there! Because we are loving studying the attributes of God. It's absolutely wonderful, it's bringing awe and joy to everything we do here.

We've learned and meditated on incredible realities. The attributes of God who has made himself known and revealed

himself through creation. In the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, posted on our website, you can read it for yourself, but we learned this statement very, very careful and precise and accurate in its language. It says this, "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God. Whose subsistence is in and of himself. Infinite in being and perfection, whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself. A most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions. Who alone hath immortality. Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto. Who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute." The confession continues in another section, "God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself, is alone in and unto himself all sufficient. Not standing in need of any creature which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things." Glorious language. Precise, accurate.

Folks, that God explains all that there is; no other God, no other system, no finding of science, none of it explains all

that there is, only that God. And if you've done any study in comparative religions, you know that there is no other God in any other religion like the one described with such biblical accuracy here. Everything from those statements comes directly from scripture. It's not what we've come up with, it's what God has revealed about himself in the bible. There is no one like him.

And the Son of God, that babe, laid in a manger, he has made that God known. He has made the one who is invisible, and incomprehensible, and unfathomable to us, all those attributes of this invisible God, he has made visible; starting with creation, starting with all of the things that have been made. Like a single beam of light, we men found this illustration helpful as to understand how God's perfect being could show up all over the world and refract all over in the glory of creation. It's like a single beam of light that passes through a prism and reveals to us a myriad of colors in the spectrum and yet each ray shares the same essential properties of that original beam on the other side of the prism. In a similar way the single beam of God's perfection, his invisible essence, it's passed through the prism of Christ in creation.

And on the, on this side of creation, what we can see, what we can know as creatures within God's creation, we perceive his invisible attributes, his eternal power, his divine nature, clearly perceived in the things that have been made. The God who said let there be light has been revealed by Christ. Who is the first born, the preeminent one of all creation, because he created all things. What things? Look back at verse 16, "things in heaven and on earth." Which is to say all the things that are up there and all the things that are down here. Pretty simple, Paul is speaking very comprehensibly of spatial reality. He's leaving nothing out.

When he writes about things that are in heaven and on earth it's basically like conveying the east and the west of space. That is to say there is no place the son did not create. Also he has created all things visible and invisible, which is to say he created things of material substance as well as things of immaterial substance, or subsistence. Scientific inquiry in our time has been captivated by the material world, and rightly so. Everybody understands that, from galaxies, to atomic particles as we focus our telescopes upward, and our microscopes downward,

everything in between, it utterly boggles the mind and captures our imagination. A single field of study can exhaust a thousand lifetimes devoted to learning. This vast material world is at, beyond our comprehension. But to conduct all of those scientific investigations we rely on all of the realities of the immaterial world. Immaterial nature.

There are realities like mathematics, like laws of logic, like principles of uniformity and inference. All of which are independent, and absolute, invariant and universal. They have no material form and yet we rely on them all the time. The Son of God created all of it; material and immaterial, time and space, things visible and invisible, things material, things immaterial.

Not only that but the son created all the different levels of power and influence. Verse 16, "Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." Whatever the structure, whatever the politics, whatever the rankings, whatever the relative relations of power, whether human or angelic, power structures, the Son of God made it all. I'm talking about human governments, whether

regional or national or international, from Barack Obama to Donald Trump, from Vladimir Putin to Xi Jinping, we're talking about all of it.

We're talking about angelic government as well. Whether holy angels or unholy demons, all of them are under the authority and sovereignty of Christ because he, the Son of God, created all things. Yes, even Satan and his demons are held fast at the bitter end of Christ's leash to do God's bidding. It's not a yin and yang, it's not dark verses light, there's no equal power to God in the universe. All things created through him and for him. By him all things are created, John 1:3 says "all things are made through him and without him was not anything made that was made." Again, pretty comprehensive. If there's anything in the created category the Son of God is the one who did it.

Which means, contrary to any modern-day Arian, the Son of God is outside of the created category. Anything that's been created he did it. So when God in the beginning decreed "Let there be," it was the Son of God who executed his decree and

thus all things are created through him. Then at the end of verse 16 notice it says "all things are created through him and for him." For him, that is to say the Son of God is not only the beginning, not only the means and the agency, but he is the end of all things.

He is the end for which all things were created, he is the culmination, he is the climactic goal. In order that the son may bring all glory to the Father. And so the Son of God takes very keen interest in caring for this world that he has been given to create. He preserves it. He sustains it, verse 17, "He is before all things and in him all things hold together." That verb, hold together, translated hold together, it means they continue to exist. They continue to endure in a condition of coherence, in a condition of integrity. They don't disintegrate, because he wills it to remain together.

Listen, the only way that things can cohere, the only way that things can adhere to one another, bind together, stick together, is because God willed it to be so through Christ. The Son of God makes it so. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that the son

sustains the world, he upholds the universe by the word of his power. For every single atom, little atomic particles, sub atomic particles, every single atom in the universe, the only reason it remains stuck together. The only reason it doesn't split apart and cause an atomic explosion, is because the Son of God is holding it together by the word of his power. Atomic scientists understand perfectly the power of the Son of God in holding things together whether they know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord or not. They know it in ignorance, if they don't know him.

Whenever they stop to ponder what, what forces keep the nucleus of an atom from blowing itself apart they are utterly stymied. The nucleus of an atom consists of positively charged protons and neutrally charged neutrons and it has an overall positive charge. By all calculation, by all observation, by all understanding, that should not be able to cohere, to exist, to be, to remain stable, because particles with the same charge repel one another.

So physicists, they realize that there is another force, an invisible force holding the nucleus of an atom together. They don't have a name for it and so they've defaulted to the best name physicists can come up with, they call it the strong force. What they perceive, but they do not know or understand, God has here identified for us. That unidentified strong force holding the nucleus of the atom together is none other than the Son of God. And we know him by name, Jesus.

For many of us we know him personally as Savior, Redeemer, and friend. Son of God upholds the universe by the word of his power and by that power all things hold together. Galaxies, solar systems, ecosystems and yes even atoms and their little nuclei. But we know him not as an impersonal strong force, we know him as Savior, Redeemer, and friend. But that's just one level of glory folks. That's just, that's just the context within which his true glory is known and this is staggering to consider because the true glory of Christmas and the true Christmas gift of God in his son is what Paul speaks of next in the passage.

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