**Study Notes on Colossians 1:15-23**

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NOTE: These notes are not intended to read as an article or well-rounded written work. Rather, this is a collage of different research and resources that will assist in the preparation of a sermon.

**Working Sermon Title**: Steadfast Faith In and Unchanging Savior

**Summary of the Passage**: Christ is God and always has been! Since the beginning of time, He came into human form to show us the invisible God. Christ’s supremacy guarantees that I can live a life of steadfast faith and hope in this shifting world.

**Outline of the passage:**

The Preeminence of Christ:

1. In Creation: (1:15-17)
   1. The image of the invisible God (1:15a)
   2. The first-born of all creation (1:15b-17)
2. In Redemption (1:18-23)
   1. The head of the body, the church (1:18a)
   2. The beginning, the first-born from the dead (1:18b)
   3. That he might have supremacy in all things (1:18c)
      1. In Him all the fullness dwells (1:19)
      2. In Him all things are being reconciled to God (1:20)
      3. The Colossians are case-in-point (1:21-23)

**The Main Point of the Passage:**

**Exegetical Idea**: There is no other means by which we are saved than through God Himself which is in Christ Jesus.

**Theological Idea**: Christ is Lord and supreme to all because He is God and has brought redemption between His creations with the Father.

**Applicational Idea**: We can find purpose, comfort and acceptance in God through Jesus Christ alone.

**Possible Preaching Outline**:

1. **15-16—Creator**: (Purpose) All things from Him and for Him
2. **17—Sustainer**: (Comfort) My still-involved creator
3. **18-23—Redeemer**: (Acceptance) Made righteous by the blood

**CONTEXT BEFORE AND AFTER THIS PASSAGE:**

BEFORE: We have the greeting and thankgiving prayer for the Colossians. This passage is establishing the idea that they have faith, love and hope because of the Gospel which has come to them.

AFTER: Paul begins to talk about his toil for their souls and the goal of wanting to present them all complete in Christ.

**Exegesis and Commentary:**

This is a change in the writing style from Paul’s previous style in this letter. Some think that he is quoting an early church hymn here.

Paul I praising God for both His Lordship and redemption of mankind to God. This is one of the strongest statements about Christ’s lordship in the whole Bible.

In this section we see that Paul is refuting several things directly:

1. Believing that matter is evil; some thought that if Jesus were really God he would become human in bodily form.
2. The false teachers were trying to convince people that God would not have created the world because he would not create evil. Jesus did create all things, but evil created itself.
3. They had thought of Jesus as just another God in their polytheistic view. Paul wanted to be clear there is only one God, and it is Jesus Christ.
4. They refused to believe that you find salvation through Jesus Christ but through that it only came through some special knowledge. Paul was proclaiming Christ by faith alone.

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

Paul is presenting Christ as similar to “wisdom” as mentioned in Proverbs 8:

**[27] When he established the heavens, I was there;**

**when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,**

**[28] when he made firm the skies above,**

**when he established the fountains of the deep,**

**[29] when he assigned to the sea its limit,**

**so that the waters might not transgress his command,**

**when he marked out the foundations of the earth,**

**[30] then I was beside him, like a master workman,**

**and I was daily his delight,**

**rejoicing before him always,**

**[31] rejoicing in his inhabited world**

**and delighting in the children of man.**

**(Proverbs 8:27-31 ESV)**

In Jewish literature God is personified as wisdom.

Paul most certainly does not mean that Christ was ever born or came into being when he uses the term **firstborn.** He is insinuating that He has always existed but as His own person in the Godhead as the Son of God. He is making clear that he is the one whom God has given all inheritance of sovereignty and everything in His kingdom.

This is how the **firstborn** statement is used of David: **“I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” - Ps. 89:27.**

**[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.**

**By Him all things were created** makes it clear that Jesus existed far before he was ever born of the Virgin Mary. John 1:3 make it clear that he was an agent of creation, also mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 8:6.

**[2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:2-3 ESV)**

**[6] yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:6 ESV)**

Because of the false teachers, the Colossian people began to believe that material things were evil. The false teacher was saying that if Jesus were truly God he would have stayed in the spiritual realm and ruled only that, never interacting in the physical realm. Paul was making it clear that all things physical and spiritual are under the reign of Christ.

**He created all things**, with no exception. He was the agent by which God created heaven and Earth. ILL: you think you are busy, try creating and managing all things ever created, **visible and invisible.**

Paul uses the Jewish language about authorities to show that even those, Jesus is supreme over. This carries the idea of those earthly authorities but also all spiritual influences and authorities. This idea is a big theme throughout the rest of this letter: Col. 2:8, 10, 15, 20.

Jesus, obviously, didn’t create evil angels. Rather he created all spiritual realm and later some chose to rebel against Him.

The idea of all thing being created **through Him and for Him** makes it clear that he is also the goal of creation. Creation is all for His honor and praise. This is why sin and misuse of the gifts He gives is grotesque to Him. It is a perversion of the good gift that He created.All things are **for Him**, not for us or merely for our pleasure.

**[17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**

Jesus is not only the creator of all things, but He is also the sustainer of all things. He keeps things from flying into utter chaos. He holds all things together. Because he is in control of all things, we are not ever independent from Him but are otherwise always dependent upon him. We see this in Heb. 1:3:

**[3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [4] having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:3-4 ESV)**

So we see through these three passages that he is the creator and sustainer. He is the reason all was created, for His glory.

We need to view Him as a servant to all, not subordinate, but truly the one to rely on for all help. He is daily protecting us, caring for us and sustaining us.

**[18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.**

In this verse we see the change begin from Jesus role as creator to His role as redeemer.

**He is the head of the body, the church,** which is consistent with what Paul wrote to the Corinthians and the Ephesians. He calls the church the Body and depicts Christ as the head.

**[27] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. [28] And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:27-28 ESV)**

**[22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23 ESV)**

**Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, (Ephesians 4:15)**

This idea of Christ being the head is a great picture of the leader of all mankind, but especially those in the Church and in Christ. Like a present-day “head of government,” this term points to Christ’s preeminence as Lord. This gives a picture of also the sustenance He gives to the whole body – controlling actions, giving nutrition and driving volition.

The statement of Jesus being **firstborn of the dead** is to make the point that He was raise from the dead, showing that he had power over the material world. He rose again and is living eternally (1 Cor 15:20; 1 Thes 4:14). Because of his power over deal we see that he is lifted to be **preeminent over all things**, which He rightfully earned.

He is the only man who has ever predicted that he would die and rise again. This is proof enough; I’m with Him.

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

This is to make the point clear that he can be both filly man and fully God. We must not dismiss any of his human or divine characteristics.

There is a beautiful understanding here for those with a Jewish background or understanding of the Old Testament. That is, the understanding was that God Filled the Temple with all of His fullness. We see this in passages like this, “I looked, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple” (Ezek. 44:4).

Now, no longer in a temple, God has chose to fill His Son entirely with the blessing of His presence. Jesus spoke of Himself as the Temple – the place where God’s presence would dwell – and said that it would be destroyed and rebuilt within three days. Jesus did not just bear the glory of God, but all of the glory of God dwells in Him. He has all the wisdom, power and glory of God in Him.

As we will see soon in Colossians 2:9, all of the fullness of God dwelling in Christ means that He is God. You can’t have the fullness of something *in* something else and it not become that object. In the same way, By God being fully in the Son, He is therefore in his very nature God Himself.

The idea of “Head” in the original language can mean both “Source” and “Authority”.

In Acts 17:24 we are told “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man” but now is dwelling in the Temple of Christ.

After Pentecost we are described as being a place where God would dwell by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

**[20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.**

The goal of God and Christ **is to reconcile all things to Himself**. There is no hidden agenda here; this is the goal without compromise. In Isaiah 9:6 the Messiah is referred to as the “Prince of Peace”. His goal to stop the rebellion against God and reconcile those who have turned their back on Him. His reign as King guarantees that he will at one point in time have final retribution against all those who rebel against God (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 19:11–21; 20:7–10).

Through Jesus all people could come to have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

That **Peace** will ultimately come through **the blood of His cross**. This is a dramatic and firm statement. By His blood all peace ultimately comes.

**[21] And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,**

This section is now looking specifically to the church at Colossae, but also is applicable for the whole church.

Paul is making it clear that they were **once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,** but now they are in Christ and their wickedness is no longer seen. Christ’s righteousness is what they are clothed in.

**[14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:14 ESV)**

**[10] I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God,**

**for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;**

**he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,**

**as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,**

**and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10 ESV)**

It should be no surprise to us that sin **alienates** us from God (Eph. 2:12; 4:18). He is Holy and asks for us to be the same so that we can have more of Him.

**“Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Ephesians 2:12**

we need to be reconciled to Him and there is nothing that we can do in our own power to earn that. That is why we need Christ to do it for us.

Without Christ we are **hostile in our minds** toward God. The NIV translates this, “We were **enemies in our minds**”. Wrong thinking always leads to sin, which destroys our relationship with God. We want to be our own God and reject Him as such. Speaking of nonbelievers, Paul writes:

**[21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:21 ESV)**

No one is good enough to save themselves. If we want to live with God, we have to rely on Jesus Christ to save us. This is true for anyone both ends of the extremes – murderer of just a good citizen. No one is good enough. Apart from Christ there is no way to have salvation.

**[22] he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,**

In order to answer the refute that Jesus was merely spirit, he makes it clear that he did die in his body of flesh. Jesus suffered and died as a human but never lost his divine nature. He was God and faced death in order to appease the wrath of His father.

This is the work of Christ summarized in a verse: He has reconciled people for the goal of **presenting us as holy and blameless and above reproach before God.** This is a sweet promise and reality for all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ as their savior.

This is the same language used in the OT to describe the unblemished animals that the Levitical priest would bring for a sacrifice to God.

How beautiful to think that when Christ brings us as His followers to His father, we are seen as **above reproach.** This means that there is nothing to be critical or pointed out. Nothing needs to be censored or reprimanded; all things laid-bare, nothing can be found that does not deserve God’s presence (col. 1:10).

**[23] if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.**

The verb being used here is one that implies full intention of follow through. The ***if*** statement communications more of an option in the English than it does in the Greek. Paul has no doubt that they will stay **steadfast in their faith.**

Faithfulness to God is essential to the Christian faith. The way that we are to remain as disciples is “established and firm” (NIV). Jesus spoke of the necessity to remain faithful to the end of our life when He said,

**[22] and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:22 ESV)**

The idea of remaining steadfast is endorsed with the idea of **not shifting.** This brings to mind the imagery that Jesus used of the house that was built on the rock or the sand in Matthew chapter 7. Paul was beginning to be emphatic that they are not to be shifting around by false teaching but should build their faith and theology on the Rock of Christ.

Paul again emphasizes his role as a **minister of the Gospel** and how the good news was going through out the whole known world (cf. 1:6).

**WORKS CITED:**

**"Study Resources: Executable Outlines: Colossians." *Blue Letter Bible*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 June 2015.**