

**Christ Above All**  
**Colossians 1:15**  
**Reality Carpinteria – Pastor Britt Merrick**  
**October 9, 2005**

Pastor Britt's Opening Prayer:

Lord, as we open up our Bibles to this book, we say thank You for the wonderful way You've been instructing us. The wonderful way You've walked us through this book. Lord, we know it is You because Jesus You are exalted in these pages. You are so exalted and shown to be pre-eminent and above all things. Lord, what wonderful news we were reminded of last week: we've been delivered and transferred. Delivered from darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the Son. Lord, this is good stuff! And, we thank You, Holy Spirit for Your faithfulness to instruct us. We ask, Holy Spirit, that You would teach us as we look at just a couple of verses. Supernaturally enable our minds to grasp what Your word has to say; that our hearts really get into what is being said, Lord; that we would be doers of the word. And because of what's been taught today, we'd go out and evangelize, lift up the truth, put a dent in the darkness, and stand against the lies and deception of the cults. Make us radical doers of the word! We want to be about Your business in these last days. As we take a few minutes to study Your word, Holy Spirit come and instruct us for the glory of Jesus Christ, and the furtherance of His kingdom. Amen.

Today we come to one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. From beginning to end, the Bible is primarily a book about Jesus Christ.

- The Old Testament records the preparation for the coming of the Lord.
- The Gospels present Him as God in human flesh come into the world to save sinners.
- The Book of Acts records the initial going forth of the message of salvation through Jesus alone.
- The Epistles explain the theology of Christ's work and the workings of His Church.
- Revelation reveals His Second Coming, and presents Jesus on the throne, reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

(Mac Arthur on Colossians; p. 43)

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is about Jesus Christ. Every part of Scripture testifies about Jesus Christ.

- On the road to Emmaus, Jesus meets up with two disciples who were disappointed that Jesus had died on the cross and their messianic expectations had been dashed. Jesus instructs them from the Old Testament and He showed them how they testified of Him, stating that the whole of scripture is about Him. (Luke 24:27)
- Of all the Bible teachings about Jesus Christ, **none** is more significant than Colossians 1:15-19.

**Colossians 1:15-19** says concerning Jesus, <sup>15</sup> and He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.

- These passages remove any doubt or confusion concerning the true identity of Jesus Christ.
  - There is plenty of doubt and confusion in our world about Jesus. Ask anyone for their opinion of who Jesus is. You will get a plethora of responses.
    - He never existed.
    - There's no trinity. It's Jesus only.
    - He was a good teacher.
    - He was a great moral man.
    - He was fraudulent.
    - He was a liar.
    - He was a lunatic.
    - He was a prophet.
    - He was one of many prophets.
  - These verses are necessary, vital, and foundational to the proper understanding of our Christian faith.

Previously, regarding the epistle to the Colossians:

- The book/epistle to the Colossians was written by Paul to the church in Colossae in order to combat some false/heretical ideas circulating in the community about Jesus.
- There were some heretical teachings about Jesus and His identity. Who He is and who He isn't.
- False teachings were beginning to creep into the church.
- Epaphras, the young man who founded this church, made a thousand mile journey to Rome, where Paul was imprisoned. He share with Paul the situation and Paul wrote this letter in response to the false ideas.
  - These false ideas are generally referred to as the Colossian Heresy.
    - It included elements of Greek philosophical thought and legalistic Judaism, the latter of which will be reviewed at a later time in Colossians chapter 2.

The Greeks loved knowledge and wisdom. They exalted knowledge and wisdom above everything else. For a large segment of the Hellenistic (Greek) population, the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom was above every other pursuit in life. They prided themselves on the sophistication of their philosophical systems.

- Gnosticism was a philosophical system that came to affect Christianity and blossomed in the second century, about 100 years after this epistle was written. (McArthur on Colossians p. 7) Paul addresses the beginnings of Gnosticism.
  - *Gnosis* is a Greek word for knowledge. Meaning, *to know*.
  - An *agnostic* is someone who doesn't know. The prefix *a* means *no, none or not*, therefore an agnostic (*a-gnosis*, no-knowledge), means they have no knowledge.
    1. Gnostics claimed to have superior knowledge, above and beyond the knowledge of others. They claimed to have secret, mysterious, esoteric knowledge that was necessary for salvation and walking with God. The basic message of the cross was too simplistic. There wasn't enough to it for them.
      - **1 Corinthians 1:23** Paul said, "**To them (the Greeks), Christ crucified is foolishness.**" God becoming a man, born of a virgin, dying on a cross an atoning death for the sins of the world, and rising from the dead, was silly. For them, Jesus Christ was not adequate for salvation.
- When Greek philosophical thought began to penetrate the church, those influenced by it began to think: Jesus is not the only way. It's Jesus **and** special knowledge.
  - This is still prevalent today! Many will say, it's all about Jesus **and** special mysterious knowledge, or visions that reveal deeper insights into the mysteries of God.
  - Paul will say, "There is **nothing** deeper than Jesus Christ!"
    1. **Colossians 2:1-4**, "**For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf...[that you may be] attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument.**"

**All hidden treasures and knowledge are in Jesus Christ.**

**All the mysteries of God are revealed in Him alone.**

**We are complete in Him.**

2. **Colossians 2:18-19**, "**Let no one keep defrauding you... taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head (Jesus)...**"
  - Any time someone claims revelation or vision that does not exalt Jesus Christ to the highest place, it is **not** from the Lord. It is **not** from the Holy Spirit!
    - Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will "testify of Me and He will exalt Me."
  - Paul warns the Church against the seduction of the false philosophy and the claims of man. He reminds them, as we also need reminding, of the sufficiency of Christ. Everything we need to know, do and experience, Jesus Christ is sufficient.
  - Paul reminds the church of the deity of Christ.
- The conclusion that the (Greek) man-made philosophy brought them to was that Jesus could not be God.

### Jesus is not God - Greek Wisdom or Ignorance

- Their conclusion grew out of the philosophical question: "Why is there evil in this world if creation was made by a Holy God?"
  - As the philosophers speculated and pondered, they came to two false conclusions.
    1. All matter, **everything** physical, is inherently evil. They made an exaggerated dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual world.
    2. A Holy God could not (ever) come into contact with evil matter. (Wiersbe on Colossians; p. 11)
  - These are false ideas for the Bible doesn't teach that everything physical is evil. Many physical things are simply morally neutral. It doesn't teach that it is **impossible** for God to come in contact with wicked creation. God simply says, "I **will not** allow wickedness into My kingdom." God **chooses** not to be in the midst of it. He is not limited by anything, evil or otherwise.
  - The Greek philosophers concluded that there were a series of "emanations" that came from God.
    - Emanation - something that comes forth from a source; a thing emitted.
    - There were good and bad emanations.
      - Good emanations were like angelic beings.
      - Bad emanations were like demons and such.
      - Each emanation had deity (God's holiness) in it.
    - The more the emanation went further from God, the less holiness there was to it. Finally, there was one emanation so far from God that he created the world and all the matter in the world, which is evil. This is not a biblical teaching.
      - They surmised that Jesus Christ is merely one of these emanations. He is on par with and not above angelic beings. He is an important emanation but just one of these emanations.
      - They did not deny Jesus Christ but they sought to dethrone Him.

**This is the same deception in false ideologies and cults today!  
They will not deny Jesus, but they will seek to dethrone Him!**

- This is true of Buddhism, Islam, the New Age, Mormonism, and the Jehovah Witnesses movements.
- By dethroning Jesus, they seek to **redefine** who He is.

### Paul Asserts the Absolute Supremacy and Deity of Jesus Christ

- In **Colossians 1:15-18** combats these false philosophical conclusions by revealing Jesus' true identity in relation to four things.
  1. In comparison to God - (verse 15)
  2. In comparison to the Universe (Creation) - (vs. 15 and 16)
  3. In comparison to the Unseen world - (v. 16)
  4. In comparison to the Church - (v. 18)
- In these passages, Paul will show that Jesus holds preeminence in all these things. He is supreme and over all these things.
- There are two important concepts in verse 15.

#### **1. Jesus - the image of the invisible God**

- **Colossians 1:15** says concerning Jesus, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."
  - The original Greek word used for "image" is: **eikon** (Greek, I-kone). Where we get the English word "icon", which refers to a statue, "likeness" or "image".
    - So, how does this exalt Jesus Christ if the Bible also says that we were created in the image of God?
      - This verse exalts Jesus because although man is also the eikon of God, in as much as we are created in the image of God, man is **not** the **perfect and complete** image of God.
      - Humans are made in God's image, in that we have a rational personality. Like God we possess intellect, emotions, and will. Because of this, we can think, feel, and choose.
      - Us humans **are not**, however, made in the **moral** image of God, which is in the absolute moral purity of God. He is **Holy**, and we are **sinful**.

Not even Adam and Eve were created in the moral image of God because they also sinned.

- We are not created in His divine attributes. He is omniscient (He knows all things), omnipotent (He is all powerful), immutable (He is unchanging, He never changes), omnipresent (He is everywhere) - - - and we are **not**. We are human, not divine.
  - Each one of these divine attributes are claimed by, or attributed to, Jesus in the New Testament.
  - People in the New Age movement will claim to be “god”. If they are, what a disappointment!

**God is all knowing, almighty, the same yesterday, today and forever.  
He is faithful - - mankind is not.  
We change according to our whims!**

- We do not possess the attribute of divinity. We are not created in God's **essential** image. We are not created in His **moral** image. We are not the **perfect** image of God.
  - Unlike man, Jesus is the perfect, absolutely accurate image of God. The Bible ascribes to Jesus every attribute of God in the Old Testament.
    - He is omniscient, omnipotent, immutable, and omnipresent.

**Jesus is made in the absolute accurate image of God.**

**2 Corinthians 4: 4, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

- Mankind was made **in** the image of God, but Jesus Christ **is** the image of God.
  - Jesus is the exact likeness, the perfect representation of God. When the apostles asked Jesus, “show us the Father, the God of Israel, Adonai, and that's enough for us”, Jesus answered them in **John 14:9**, “**He who has seen Me has seen the Father.**”
    - Jesus is saying, that He and the Father are **ONE**, in essence, a unity, one being.
  - **Hebrews 1:3**, “**And He is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of His nature...**”
    - “Exact representation”, meaning He is **not a lesser** emanation. This word *representation* in the Greek means an engraving tool, or stamp. Jesus is the perfect, exact likeness of God (**John 14:9**). He is in the very form of God (**Phil. 2:6**). “In Christ, the invisible God became visible.” **John 1:14**, “**And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of God.**”

**Jesus is God in the flesh.**

**This is a declaration of the Word of God, from beginning to end.  
And Jesus also claimed that He is God!**

**Note:** when we are faithful to learn what God wants to teach us, to get a grasp on doctrine and what the Bible has to say, the Lord is always faithful to give us an opportunity to use that knowledge.

You are His vessel, His tool. **Ephesians 2:10** says, “**For we are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which He prepared beforehand that you should walk in them.**” (Meaning that some will and some won't walk in the works that God has for them.)

Some of us will come across people who have a stumbling block in their lives concerning the deity of Jesus Christ. Perhaps they grew up as Jehovah's Witnesses (JW). They are longing spiritually, because the cult of JW will never satisfy them spiritually. You are the beggar who has found bread. You have the answer to their inner longing. You have that peace, joy, and hope, which is found in Jesus and His true identity. But that poor soul, who is not redeemed and is hungry and thirsty for God has a stumbling block that has been placed in their life through a lie that tells them Jesus is not God and not the only unique Savior of the world!

By grasping the word of God, through reasoning and sharing the word,  
can remove that stumbling block.  
Hearts will be open to the Holy Spirit, Who wants to save them.  
Pay attention!

## 2. Jesus - the First-born of All Creation

- In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Alexandria, Egypt, there developed a heretical idea that Jesus was not deity, the idea that He was not divine got a hold in the church. Those who denied the deity of Jesus used this passage in their defense. They read Colossians 1:15, “**Jesus is the firstborn of all creation.**” And argued that Jesus is **created**.
  - Jehovah Witnesses of today also believe this. This is a primary text that they will take you to. They will say, “Jesus is created, He is the first-born, God created Him. He is **not** God. He is **a** god.” They’ll even teach that He is a mighty god, but not God.
- First, study scripture in context. Verse 16-17, “**For by Him (Jesus) all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him.**” <sup>17</sup> **He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.**”
  - If you believe that Jesus was created, then you’ll have a problem with verse 16, which states that Jesus is the creator of all things. That all things were created by Him, and for Him. He is before all things and He holds everything together! There can’t be anything apart from Jesus Christ, according to verses, 16 and 17.
  - In 1961, the JWs went and made their own translation of the Bible, called the New World Translation, and they **changed** the wording: “all **other** things were created by Him...”
    - In their translation of the Bible (the New World Translation) they have **inserted** the word “**other**” 4 times in verses 16 to 17.
      - **New World Translation: Colossians 16-17**, “because by means of him all [other] things were in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all [other] things and by mean of him all [other] things were made to exist.” (New World Translation exact quote).
    - They have added and changed the meaning of the scriptures, and thereby changed the identity of Jesus. They have not denied Him, but have cleverly dethroned Him.
    - **They cannot change the original.** The unchanged text of the Bible you have before you clearly reveals that Jesus is the: Creator (verse16), Sustainer (verse17), and God (versel6b). Jesus keeps all things together and they all exist for Him.
- If the letter written by Paul says He is the creator of all things, then what does he mean by saying that Jesus is “the first-born of all creation”?
  - The word used for “first-born” is the Greek word *prototokos*. It does not carry the idea of “first-created”, which is another Greek word called *protoktistos*.
  - The Holy Spirit chose the word that means first-born, *prototokos*. He did not choose the word that means “first-created”, *protoktistos*. The Holy Spirit is very precise in the words He chooses. But, why did the Holy Spirit use the word *prototokos* (first-born)?
    - In biblical times (in both Jewish and Greek culture) the word “firstborn” meant “first in rank”, which means preeminence (most excellent). The first-born son had the right to the inheritance, but it did not necessarily mean that he was the **first one born**. **Examine the following examples.**
      - Example 1, in Psalms 89:27, King David was called “first-born”. If you know your Bible, you know that King David was actually the last-born son of his father Jesse. David was the youngest of all his brothers. But, because he was the preeminent son. He was called the “first-born” by God and crowned by God as king.
      - Example 2: Israel is called the “first-born” of God in Exodus 4:22 and Jeremiah 31:9. Though Israel is not the first nation ever born. But, they hold first place in God’s sight and plan among the nations. They are not the first people to exist, but they are called more than once in the Bible, the first-born of God.

- Example 3: In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is called the “first-born of the dead”, even though He was not the first person in the Bible to be resurrected from the dead. There were people in the Old and New Testament who were resurrected before Him. But, He was the only person who did not die again. In God’s heart, Jesus is preeminent (most excellent). Among all who have ever been resurrected, He ranks as the first-born. Obviously!!
- Example 4: In Romans 8:29, Jesus is referred to as ‘the first-born’ among those in the Church, among the brethren. Clearly, this speaks of his position, as the Head of the Church.
- Obviously, it is now clear beyond a shadow of a doubt the perfect use of “first-born” in Colossians 1:15, because of its use in the rest of the Bible. *Prototokos*, first-born, means highest in rank, not first created.

**Let scripture comment on scripture.  
Read the word of God in context and in light of what the rest of scripture says.  
It will all become very clear.**

**Although you are clear on this,  
there are many of your neighbors and friends,  
who are not clear on the identity of Jesus Christ.**

**Note:** in the book of 1 John it says, “The commandments of the Lord are not burdensome.” One of the commandments of the Lord is, **“Go into all the earth and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them all that I’ve commanded, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”** The Trinity.

**You now have knowledge. With knowledge comes responsibility.**

We’ve touched the tip of the iceberg on things such as this. This is called apologetics, defending the faith. Begin to learn to defend the basic tenants of the Christian faith. Your faith will be bolstered, you will be blessed, and you will lead people to the kingdom. You will be able to partner with the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit deals in truth. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bring to remembrance all that Jesus had said.

**A personal note from Pastor Britt:**

People ask me all the time, “where did you go to bible college or seminary?” I never went to Bible College. I went to UCSB to study business and communication. But, that became my bible college. When I went to UCSB, I was a nominal Christian. I’d read the Bible, been to a few bible studies. I knew in my heart and believed that Jesus was God, that He died on the cross for my sins, and that He rose from the dead physically. He was my Savior and the only way to salvation. I **knew** these things in my heart. But, in school, in a class that had nothing to do with religion, the teacher would state that you couldn’t believe in Christianity, you couldn’t believe in the Bible and in those people who preach Jesus. They spoke against the validity of the Bible and against the identity of Jesus Christ.

I took some courses from the religious studies department. It only got worse from there. Everywhere I turned denied the inerrancy of scripture and the deity and supremacy of Jesus Christ. Everywhere I turned. I had a problem because I believed something and I didn’t know **why** I believed it. And, I wasn’t able to defend it. That was a problem!

I didn’t have a mentor at the time. I wasn’t connected to a church. I just began to read the Bible. Every bit that I could get, I just began to read and soak it in and soak it in. And the Holy Spirit began to instruct, as He will you. It says in 1 John that the Holy Spirit is able to instruct you directly.

Don’t be found in the problem of, ***I know what I believe but I don’t know why***. I couldn’t explain it very well and I certainly could not defend it. That is not a good place to be in.

If you’re a Christian, and you just got saved, that’s okay. But, if you’ve been a Christian for very long and you can’t defend the faith, shame on you. ***Know what you believe and why you believe. Read the Bible.*** All the answers are there. It’s all you need.

**Pastor Britt's Closing Prayer:**

Thank You, Lord, for this wonderful time in Your word. Thank you for those couple of little things that You've taught us. Lord, we ask that You would minister them into our hearts, that You would seal them in there. Anywhere that I have not explained it well, Holy Spirit, thank You that You are the teacher of all things. Go ahead and clean that up for me, Lord. I pray that You would make us doers of the word. That You would put that wonderful, beautiful burden on us of being salt and light, of representing You, to stand up in righteousness and truth before a wicked and perverse generation. In the midst of the Last Days' deception, that we would know beyond a shadow of a doubt what is true and why we know it. Lord, do that in this church. Do that in us as individuals. We ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Let's worship the Lord and exalt Him! Sing about how good He is, how wonderful He is, how holy He is! Press in to the Lord!