

## Jesus Is Glorious (Col 1.15-19)

### I. REVIEW: THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

- A. Knowing and following Jesus is at the center of Christianity. Because of this, it is essential for us to understand what the *scripture reveals* about him in order that we might respond to him in *faith* and *obedience* with the whole of our lives.
- B. In Matthew 16.15-18, Jesus outlines that the foundation upon which he will build his church is the profession of the truth of his person rightly perceived through revelation.

<sup>15</sup>And he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven... <sup>18</sup>and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt 16.15-18)

- C. The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ himself — both in reality (his church united to him spiritually by the Holy Spirit) and in belief (the rightly held doctrine of Jesus Christ). Jesus promises that this foundation will not be shaken and will not ultimately be prevailed against by the schemes of the devil.

### II. CHRIST ABOVE ALL

- A. In Colossians 1.15-20, Paul offers up an extended meditation on the person of Christ Jesus. Within the argument of Colossians, this meditation on the glories of Christ's person plays an instrumental role in their worship and in their Christian lives.
- B. What we see in this passage is that the revelation of Christ's person is intended to bring us into a specific way of *seeing* and *experiencing* Christ Jesus — namely, that we would see him as preeminent and glorious.
- C. The prophet Isaiah promised that there would be a day when God's anointed Messiah would be seen among his people as *beautiful* and *glorious*.

<sup>2</sup>In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious (Isa 4.2)

- D. The glory of the Christian life is an invitation to *see* and *experience* the preeminent glory of Jesus Christ. We are invited to enter into the reality of Christ's infinite beauty, his unending splendor, and his immense worth.
- E. Paul begins this passage by highlighting several essential truths related to the person of Christ Jesus.

- 1. ***Image of the invisible God***: Paul declares that Jesus is the "image" of the God who cannot be seen. This declares that Jesus himself reveals and shows the true nature of God in a "form" that we can understand and experience. Jesus is the Word of God spoken in the language of humanity in order that we might see the splendor, the majesty, the character, and the beauty of the uncreated God.

<sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1.18)

<sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Heb 1.3)

- 2. ***Firstborn of all creation***: This statement demonstrates that Jesus Christ holds a particular *role* or *office* over the whole of all creation. To say that he is "firstborn" does not imply that he is part of God's creation (the very next set of statements goes on to disprove that). Rather, what Paul is showing here is that he holds the role of being the firstborn son of God over the whole of creation.

<sup>27</sup>And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth (Ps 89.27)

3. **Role in creation:** Paul then highlights Jesus' role over all created order. To state that Jesus created all things demonstrates that he himself is God (cf. Isa 44.24). Paul highlights here not only that Jesus Christ created, but demonstrates that he was the **source** of creation (*by him*), the **agent** of creation (*through him*), and the **ultimate aim** of creation (*for him*). This means that Jesus Christ existed before all things, and he is the one through whom all things presently consist (or are held together). Demonstrating the creative power of Christ Jesus highlights his full share in the divine nature of God.

<sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him not any thing was made that was made (John 1.3)

<sup>2</sup>in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world... <sup>3</sup>and he upholds the universe by the word of his power (Heb 1.2-3)

4. **The head of the body:** Now Paul moves from Christ's role over all of creation to his role at the head of the new creation of God. He starts by declaring that Jesus is the head of the body, the church. This demonstrates that the people of God are *joined to Christ Jesus* in intimate union by the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in this world. Jesus is the head of his people and is joined to them spiritually even now — leading, caring for, directing, and empowering them according to his purposes.

<sup>20</sup>when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all (Eph 1.20-23)

5. **The beginning:** Within the flow of Paul's declaration here, it is likely that he is intending to show that Jesus Christ is the beginning of the *new creation* of God. In Christ Jesus the new creatural work of God's redeeming power has broken into the world. He now stands as the starting point of God's redemptive work that will touch all of creation.

<sup>14</sup>And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation." (Rev 3.14)

6. **The firstborn from the dead:** In a similar manner to the statement above, this is less a temporal reality (that Jesus is the first in order from the dead — although he is) and more of a title of his role, status, and authority within the redemptive purposes of God. Jesus stands at the head of the death-defeating work of God. He is the one who will lead many sons into glory as the firstfruits of the glorious resurrection life that God will work in his redemption.

<sup>5</sup>Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead (Rev 1.5)

<sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup>For as by a man came death, by a man has come the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. (1 Cor 15.20-23)

<sup>10</sup>it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exists, in bringing many sons to glory... (Heb 2.10)

- F. After declaring all these things to be true of Christ, Paul lays out the *reason* or the *outcome* of all these things. He says that all these things are true so that in everything **Christ might be preeminent**.
- G. Paul declares that the *goal* of rehearsing all of these glorious truths about the person of Christ is precisely in order that he would have supremacy (or preeminence) in and over everything.
- H. Said differently, Jesus is to be seen and treasured as the most glorious, beautiful, all-satisfying, worthy, and delightful reality in all of creation. The truths *about* Jesus are designed to tell us something about his worth, his place, his status, and his role in all things. These truths are not abstractions meant to be simply learned — rather they are glorious realities that are meant to be adored, loved, and cherished.

### III. BEHOLDING THE GLORY OF CHRIST BY FAITH

- A. After outlining these truths at the outset of the letter to the Colossians, Paul begins his section of application by calling the church to respond by **setting their minds** on the truths that are above — namely, the truths that are gloriously revealed in Christ Jesus.

<sup>1</sup>If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup>For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col 3.1-4)

- B. The precise application of engaging the truths of Christ Jesus is to set our minds upon them through the glorious reality of meditation. These truths are to become the fascination and obsession of our hearts, as we seek to set our minds upon them in faith.
- C. To grow in our delight in the truths of the person of Christ requires two necessary aspects:
1. **Revelation:** in order for these truths to become “alive” in our hearts requires the gift of the Spirit’s presence in our minds and hearts. He must move upon us by revelation (and inspiration) and cause us to have living understanding of these truths.

<sup>10</sup>these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God... <sup>12</sup>Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (1 Cor 2.10-12)

<sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup>having the eyes of your hearts enlightened (Eph 1.17-18)

2. **Our participation:** however, the reality of revelation is closely tied to our seeking to lay hold of God’s truth. This includes orienting our faculties (minds, emotions, will) to pursue the means that he has ordained to receive the life-giving touch of his Spirit (meditation, prayer, fasting, etc.).

<sup>14</sup>Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Eph 5.14)

<sup>1</sup>Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup>For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 6.1-2)

- D. Elsewhere, Paul demonstrates that for those who are in Christ, we have been given the glorious gift to **behold the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus**. This glorious privilege far outstrips the experience that Moses had on Mount Sinai and is *right now* available to all believers by faith.

<sup>16</sup>when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup>Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup>And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3.16-18)

- E. In this life we are to set our minds and our gaze upon the person of Christ in the place of meditation. We do this by faith now as though in a dim mirror — but one day we will do this by sight, as though face to face. This means that our eternal occupation will be to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Cor 13.12)

- F. Many believers do not spend time fixing their gaze upon the glorious realities of Christ as revealed in the Scripture. We must not allow the “dim mirror” (lack of zeal, vigor, focus) nature of gazing upon him with eyes of faith to cause us to draw back in apathy or unbelief.

*“I shall only say, that those who are in conversant with these objects of faith [the glory of God in Christ] — whose minds are not delighted in the admiration of, and acquiescence in, things incomprehensible, such as is this constitution of the person of Christ — who would reduce all things to the measure of their own understandings, or else wilfully live in the neglect of what they cannot comprehend — do not much prepare themselves for that vision of these things in glory, wherein our blessedness doth consist.”<sup>21</sup>*

- G. We must understand that fascination with (satisfaction in) the glory of Christ Jesus will be our eternal occupation. It is the **primary design** that God has for your life and the **primary desire** of Christ Jesus for his church.

<sup>24</sup>Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world (John 17.24)

- H. We must see Christ as the glorious treasure hidden in the field who is worth **selling all** to attain. Many do not ever see/find the treasure and simply walk through life as if passing over an empty field. To find the treasure, we must be intentional to search out God’s beauty and his value through all the days of our lives.

<sup>44</sup>The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys the field. (Matt 13.44)

- I. Paul’s consuming vision in his life was to **know the glory of Christ Jesus**. This governed all his actions and pursuits; and he exhorted the church to follow such ways.

<sup>8</sup>Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I might gain Christ... <sup>10</sup>that I may know him... <sup>12</sup>I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup>Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Let those of us who are mature think this way... <sup>17</sup>Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us (Phil 3.8-17)

#### IV. MEDITATING ON THE GLORY OF CHRIST

- A. The primary means that God has given us to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ is through **meditation on his word**. In meditation we partner with God’s grace in the renewal of our minds as we look at his truth with a spirit of faith.
- B. Understanding the process of growth in the word will help us endure through the difficulty and hardship of barren times in the word, as our hearts are tenderized and softened to God’s glory.

**Understanding → Meditation → Revelation/Illumination → Inspiration → Transformation**

- C. The process of meditation (although there are different ways of engaging) consists of two broad elements: (1) praying the word; and (2) listening.
1. **Praying the Word:** Believers must not be content with simply reading the word and grasping what it means — the word must be turned into *active dialogue* with God. This is Christian meditation: the process of filling our minds with God’s word by *speaking it back to him*.
  2. **Listening to God’s Word:** In the process of meditation, it is important to pause in order to listen to God. Prayer is not a one-way conversation. Expect that God will speak to you, and that you will know and understand his voice! (John 10.2-4)

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<sup>1</sup>John Owen, *The Glory of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 52.