



Text: Colossians 1:15-23
Title: "The Christ We Must Know."
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Introduction:

In Matthew 16:13-17 Jesus asks 2 important questions about His own identity:

1. He asks a general question: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt 16:13)
2. He asks a more specific question: "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt 16:15)

In Jesus' investigation, we learn that there are 2 different types of *Christology*. There is the Christology of *imagination*, and the Christology of *revelation*.

- In Matthew 16:14, the popular views of Jesus were products of imagination (i.e., Jesus being a reincarnation of John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or other prophets).
- Matthew 16:16, Peter's Christology ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.") was a revelation from God.
- [John Calvin writes in his commentary on Matthew 16:15](#) "The greatest vigilance is necessary, that though the whole world may be carried away by its own inventions, believers may continually adhere to Christ. Among the confused and discordant voices of the world, let this voice of Christ perpetually sound in our ears, which calls us away from unsettled and wavering men, that we may not follow the multitude, and that our faith may not be tossed about amongst the billows of contending opinions."
- Just as it was in the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, so it is today. The Jesus that most people believe in is a product of imagination. But there is a remnant of people who believe in the Jesus of revelation. That remnant is known as the church. Jesus said in (Matthew 24:24) that false Christs will arise, and he gave us instructions to be aware and vigilant.
- Considering this reality, I want to present 2 questions to consider:
 - 1) Who do you say that Jesus is?
 - 2) Does your Jesus align with Scripture?
- These questions are important because they distinguish authentic Christianity from counterfeit Christianity. A Jesus that is a figment of our imagination results in condemnation. **Only the Jesus of biblical revelation brings salvation.**
- There are many ways to be wrong about the identity of Christ:
 - Jehovah's witnesses believe that Jesus is an archangel.
 - Muslims believe that Jesus is just a prophet.
 - New agers believe that Jesus is a spiritual guru.
 - Pluralists believe that Jesus is a viable option among many options.

It is important to know that although there are many ways to be wrong about Christ, there is only ONE WAY to get Christ right. We can be sure to identify Jesus correctly by considering the words of the apostle Paul in our text. In this passage in Colossians, Paul reveals to us the true Christ:

- The true Christ is the image of God. (Colossians 1:15)
- The true Christ is the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15-17)
- The true Christ is the head of the church. (Colossians 1:15-23)

Jesus is the Image of God (vv15)

“Image” here is a translation of the Greek word “eikon”. This word is used 6x in the Greek New Testament. It is used 2x in relation to Jesus as the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15)

It is tempting to think that Paul means “picture” when he refers to Christ as “the image of the invisible God”, but that is not what Paul means.

- Pictures may represent a person, but pictures are not the person.
- Pictures become less accurate over time.
- Pictures cannot do anything.
- It would be highly offensive to God for us to believe that Christ is merely a picture. In fact, such a view of Christ would be a violation of the 2nd Commandment (Exodus 20:4) because it would mean that Christ is a graven image, which is wrong because it reduces Christ down to a created thing. Creatures cannot be God! Creatures cannot save! **The real Jesus cannot be a picture of God, because he is God.**

What does it mean for Jesus to be the image of God?

New Testament scholar FF Bruce writes: *“To say that Christ is the image of God is to say that in him the nature and being of God have been perfectly revealed---- That in him the invisible has become visible.”*

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

- In John 1:18, the 4 English words “has made him known” are one word in the Greek, “**exégeomai**” it means to *explain* in a way that clarifies *what* has *priority*. This word was used by Jewish historian Josephus as a technical term for the interpretation of the law. From this word we get our English word “exegesis” which mean to draw out meaning. **The Greek word here teaches us that God in His essential nature is incomprehensible, but Jesus in His incarnation explains God to us. He literally exegetes God for us. Simply put we cannot truly know God in an intimate, redeeming way apart from Christ.**

*John 14:8-9 Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” **Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?***

- **Jesus here is not saying that he is the Father---**He is saying that in His incarnation, He perfectly reveals the nature of His Father. Jesus is the only member of the Holy Trinity that can be seen. God the Father did not come in the flesh. God the Son came in flesh, and since he is God, He perfectly shows us what the Father is like. We don’t need God the Father to come in the flesh, because His son Jesus Christ PERFECTLY reveals Him to us. (John 12:45 **“He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me.)**
- **In Exodus 33:17-23**, Moses asks God to see His glory, and God revealed it to him in a limited way. God told Moses, **“You cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live.”** God then hid Moses in the cleft of a rock and passed by him. The glory that Moses ultimately saw was a veiled glory.
- In Christ, we have an even greater revelation of the glory than what Moses had, because in Christ, the glory of God glory is seen fully. Paul writes in **(2 Corinthians 3:18) ----- 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.** The full glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ! **(2 Corinthians 4:6)**

Paul is clear that the real Jesus is the image of God, and for us this means that:

- **We see God by looking at Christ**----Looking outside of Christ to see God would be like trying to see the sun blindfolded. Just as a blindfold hinders the brightness of the sun, so does false Christs hinder us from seeing the glory of God revealed in the true Christ.
- **We find God in Christ**----Since Jesus is the image of God, he is God. Which means our search for God ends when we behold Jesus. (Colossians 2:9)
- **We must turn away from idols!** ----Since God has been made visible in Christ, we have no need to look at any false image or false religion claiming to reveal God. **(1 John 5:20-21)**

Jesus the firstborn of all creation (vv15-17)

The term “firstborn” here does not mean that Christ had a beginning. Such an interpretation is a heresy called “Arianism” which teaches that Jesus is a created being or a lesser god. Among others, Jehovah’s witnesses and Islam are the cults that teach this heresy. Jesus is what theologians call “**Homoousias**” (i.e., **He shares the same nature as the Father**). He is God (John 1:1, 14, 20:28, Titus 2:13, Romans 9:5, 2 Peter 1:1). “**Firstborn**” as it is used here refers not to Jesus’ birth but to Jesus’s **status and primacy, and authority of the Son of God**. This word “firstborn” as it is used here in Colossians is also used the same way in the Old Testament.

- **Psalm 89:27---Yahweh will make David’s son the “firstborn” over all the kings of the earth.**

Paul uses the term “**Firstborn**” to communicate that **Jesus is the ultimate authority**. He is the absolute sovereign ruler over creation.

- **Jesus’ status as “firstborn” DEMANDS that we bow to him as Lord. The lordship of Jesus is clearly seen throughout the New Testament: Matthew 25, Acts 10:36, Philippians 2:10-11)**
- There is a contemporary movement called “free grace” which teaches that a person does not have to acknowledge Christ’s lordship to be saved. Yet, the Bible presents Christ as “Lord and Savior”. A disciple of Christ is one who is submitted to the lordship of Christ. A person simply cannot be a disciple of the biblical Christ, if they do not acknowledge His lordship. Jesus’ own teaching about discipleship makes this clear:
 - **Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” –Luke 9:61-62**
- Paul literally equates true salvation with being transported into a new kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14). If salvation is the translation into a kingdom, then salvation is also God placing us under the authority of a King. That King is Jesus (Colossians 1:15-20), which clearly implies lordship.

According to verses 16-17, there are 5 reasons why Jesus must be acknowledged as Lord:

1. **Jesus is the Source of creation. (vv16)** ---- Paul Goes out of his way to make it clear that everything that exist owes its existence to Jesus. Jesus made EVERYTHING in heaven. Jesus made EVERYTHING on earth. Jesus made EVERYTHING that rules. Jesus made EVERYTHING that has authority. Jesus made EVERYTHING invisible. Paul is making it clear to us that there isn’t one aspect of creation that Jesus isn’t responsible for.
2. **Jesus is the Agent of creation. (vv16)** -----Paul’s point here is to show how Jesus relates to the Father in creation. God the Father spoke creation into being (Genesis 1:1), and God the Son is the divine Word that brought everything into being (1 Corinthians 8:6). One scholar wrote: *“Just as election takes place in Christ, so does creation take place in Christ.”*
3. **Jesus is the Goal of creation (vv16)** ----All that exist does not merely exist for its own sake. It exists to bring glory to Christ. Every single problem in creation is tied to the fact that the cosmos is out of order because it is not perfectly submitted to the lordship of Christ. All created things exist for Jesus. (Ephesians 1:10).

4. **Jesus is Preeminent over creation. (vv16)** ----Who Jesus is demands that He be the ultimate priority in ALL THINGS. Jesus cannot be 2nd place. If Jesus is not 1st in our lives, then He is not properly valued and certainly not properly worshipped. Only deity deserves this position, and if Jesus isn't deity, then regarding Him as preeminent is idolatrous. But the fact is that He IS God (Colossians 2:8). Therefore, He calls us to follow Him and value Him above ALL THINGS. (Luke 14:26)
5. **Jesus is the Sustainer of creation (vv17)** ----- He sovereignly and providentially governs history and all other things by the word of His power. He is the governor of all governments. He is the Kings of all kings. He is the source of all resources. He is the life that give life to all other lives. We stand because Jesus keeps us on our feet. We breathe because Jesus sustains our lungs. We eat because Jesus gives us food. The sun gives us light because Jesus makes it shine. The earth rotates because Jesus keeps it spinning. Our world is not as bad as it could be because Jesus is restraining evil. We live in His world, under His rule, even if we don't believe that He is the one who is upholding us. (Hebrews 1:3)

Jesus is head the church (vv18-23)

These great truths in (vv15-17) about Christ aren't designed to merely give us good arguments for the deity of Christ. Paul has a particular reason for explaining what he explains in verses 15-17. His ultimate point is that since Christ is creator, He is also lord and redeemer (vv18-23). This has 6 implications for the Church today:

1. **The Church exists based on divine initiative**----Unlike the false religions, the church is God's idea. Paul calls the church "God's workmanship" (Ephesians 2:10).
2. **The Church is governed by divine Authority**---- The pope is not the head of the Church. If the pope or any other human was the head of the Church, we would have reason to fear its failure. But because Christ is the head, the true, regenerate church will never die because her founder and head is God (vv18). And so, we never have to worry about the true Church failing. There is no human authority on earth who is the head of the universal Church. Only Christ has absolute headship over the church. These ideas of Christ headship are throughout the Paul's letters (Ephesians 1:22; 3:10,21; 5:24-32).
3. **The Church is under divine leadership**----Although Christ gifts the church with pastors and teachers to lead and edify her (Ephesians 4:11), the ultimate leadership is Christ. Pastors are referred to by Peter as "under-shepherds" who are under the ultimate leadership of Christ, through His word. (1 Peter 5:4, 2 Timothy 3:16). Christ leadership over the Church is the ultimate source of the spiritual growth of the church (Colossians 2:19).
4. **The Church has the truth about God and salvation** -----Only Jesus conquered the penalty of sin, which is death (vv18)—he is referred to as: "the beginning" and "firstborn from the dead" because he was the first to completely and permanently defeat death. He had a bodily resurrection. He set the expectation for all believers. He is what Paul called "the first fruits of the resurrection." (1 Corinthians 15:23). Believers know exactly what lay beyond the grave because of Christ. The ultimate future of believers is to receive a glorified body like Christ (Philippians 3:21). By permanently defeating death, Christ proved Himself to truly be God (vv19), therefore only Jesus is qualified to accomplish redemption and reconcile us to God (vv20). If this is true, then all other religions are powerless because Jesus accomplished what no other religion could accomplish (Redemption, Reconciliation, Resurrection).
5. **Only Christ can provide the transformation we need**----In Christ we go from being alienated from God and enslaved to sin (vv21) to being reconciled to God and set free from sin (vv22). Only the One who made us can redeem us. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

6. **The true Church is marked by fidelity to Christ and His message-----(vv23) ---**The church is not called to be “progressive”. The message that is proclaimed is the historic truth about who Christ is and what Christ did (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The message of the church NEVER changes. Paul refers to the church as the “Pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15) and that is because she is unwavering in her message.

Application points:

The Church must continue to be purely devoted to Christ!

- In him is the answer to the questions concerning origin and meaning (Colossians 1:15-20)
- In him we have the absolute truth about redemption (Colossians 1:14,18-22)
- In him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge---(Colossians 2:3)
- In him the fullness of God dwells (Colossians 2:9)
- In him redemption is obtained (Colossians 2:11-14)
- In him we are set free from false religion (Colossians 2:16-22)
- In him we have a sure foundation for spiritual maturity (Colossians 3:1-14)
- In him we have a reason to sing (Colossians 3:15-17)
- In him we can glorify God in our marriages, our parenting, and our employment (Colossians 3:18-25)

If you haven't yet come to Christ, Come now! Repent of your sin and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ!

- Christ is the one who made you!
- Christ is the one who sustains you!
- Christ is the one who knows you better than you know yourself!
- Christ is the one who can free you from the penalty, power, and presence of your sin!
- Christ is the true and living God!

As we have learned. Only a biblical view of Jesus saves. The biblical view of Jesus presents him as God, the creator of the world, the Lord of the world, the purpose of the world, and the Redeemer of the world. If we do not see Jesus as such, we do not know the biblical Jesus and we become modern versions of the people in (Matthew 16:14) who reduced Jesus down to a mere creature based on their own imagination. Only the Jesus revealed to and confessed by Peter in (Matthew 16:16) and Paul here in Colossians 1:15-23 saves. The God of creation is the God of redemption, we know him fully in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus can save us because he made us. There is salvation in no other name.