

# All things were created for Him

Colossians 1:15-20 - St Andrew's 23rd January 2022

---

You may remember that we had this passage, slightly expanded, back in September 2021. My father walked us through verses 13 to 23, and did so in some detail. But because of the richness of this text, I don't think there should be that much overlap in what I'm saying.

First, let's quickly remember where in Colossians we are and what the point of Paul's letter to the Colossians is.

Paul is writing to a congregation that he hears has strayed from the path. Epaphras, founder of the church in Colosse, has brought Paul disturbing news that church has fallen into syncretism - the blending of different religious beliefs, so as to make a hybrid religion, that no longer resembles true Christianity.

The letter starts with a greeting, thanksgiving for the fact that they have heard the true gospel and are showing love for one another, and prayer that they would have greater understanding and return to God's way.

That brings us up to chapter 1 verse 15, where we start our passage and Paul goes on the offensive, so to speak, beginning his presentation of what the correct position is, that the Colossians have strayed from. He starts, as you might expect, with Christ.

It's noticeable that Paul shifts from long sentences in the preceding verses into these short, staccato verses - short, simple, poetic declarations about Christ. Some have thought that Paul is actually referencing an early hymn here, though we can't say for certain. In any case, there is a lot crammed into these six short verses.

Pay attention also to the word 'all' - in my translation verse 18 has 'everything', which could again be rendered 'all things'. Eight instances of 'all' (each the same Greek adjective) in these six verses.

Our passage is in two parts - first Christ as Creator, verses 15 to 17 and then Christ as Redeemer, verses 18 to 20.

## Christ the Creator - v15-17

*15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Our first three verses make clear that Christ is the Creator. By Him all things were created.

### Firstborn of all creation

Now let's tackle one particular thing that might trip us up - this word *firstborn*.

5 years or so ago the Jehovah's Witnesses came round - we talked about whether Christ is God and this is a verse they took to support their case.

It's not necessarily obvious what this means - it could conceivably be consistent with a Jehovah's Witness view of who Jesus is. Sometimes with these things there's some meaning lost in translation, but in this case the translation is basically literal. What we really need to do is look at the rest of scripture's teaching about Christ and see this verse in the light of the whole. Now to do that justice would take all day, but let's look at somewhere else that uses a similar kind of phrase.

Psalms 89, at a point in the psalm that is talking about God's covenant with David, verse 27 it says this:

*...I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.*

David remember was not the firstborn of even his own family - in fact he was the youngest of his brothers. Once he's born, he couldn't be made firstborn in the sense of literally being the first one to be born. Rather, this phrase I think refers to how a firstborn would be treated, how a firstborn inherits, how a firstborn is exalted above his brothers.

In this manner, Christ the eternal Son of God is the firstborn of all creation - he is exalted over all creation and he is, like David, the highest of the kings of the earth. Indeed he is said to sit on David's throne.

Let's look also at John 1, verse 3:

*All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.*

It's like this verse was made for the occasion - it explicitly says that Christ is outside the set of things that were made. That is, Christ is not part of creation. He's the creator.

## **Christ active in creation**

Verse 16 - "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" - The Son of God is not tagging along for creation, he's an active party. Jesus didn't get thrust into the world he was not concerned with when he came to Earth. No, he was intimately familiar with it, because He made it. The work of creation is attributed to all three persons of the Trinity at various places in scripture - Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all implicated in the creation of the world. In fact, if God is one, if the persons of the Trinity are of one will, then it makes perfect sense that creation is a joint effort.

Verse 16 continues - "whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through Him and for Him". Every authority on earth or in heaven is subordinate to Him, he created them all and they all owe their existence to Him.

Verse 17 - "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together." Paul restates that Jesus is before creation - what was implicit in verse 16 is now explicit - that He, Christ, is not himself created. And creation is not a one and done deal - God doesn't, thankfully, just leave creation alone to do its thing after He has created it. Jesus is the moment-by-moment sustainer and unifying power of the universe. As Hebrews 1 says (verse 1-4):

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 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.*

Which leads us nicely onto the next three verses.

## **Christ the Redeemer - v18-20**

*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. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

In the next three verses we see Christ the redeemer. He has reconciled to himself all things, making peace by the blood of his cross.

We see in verse 18 that word again, *firstborn*. This time He is the firstborn from the dead. Christ, the resurrected saviour, first to be resurrected. Others before Jesus were raised from the dead, in the sense that life came back to their dead bodies. Think about Elijah's healing of the boy who grew sick and died (1 Kings 17:17-24) - Elijah lays on top of him and prays out loud for God's help. Three rounds of this and the boy starts breathing again. Or think of Lazarus (John 11:1-44) - Jesus commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb, and when he does he's still in his grave clothes that he was buried in. These people were more revived than resurrected - miraculous, of course, but a different quality than the resurrected Jesus and the resurrection we will experience when we are resurrected to be with Christ. Resurrection is not just heavenly CPR, God doesn't just shock you back to life - it is being remade. And Jesus Christ was the first remade man, paving the path for our resurrection.

Let's not forget what we learnt in verse 17 about what it means to be the firstborn either - he is exalted above all others, he is the resurrected King. He is preeminent in creation, he is preeminent in redemption.

Verse 19 tells us how a bit about how did it - he became one of us. "In Him, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" - that is, in a human body, God's perfect image came to Earth and lived among us.

Verse 20 - "through Him, all things were reconciled, whether in earth or in heaven" - the whole creation will be restored. There is no lack in the power of Christ's peacemaking, we can look forward to a world wholly devoted to Him. One where the relationship between God and man is brought back together and we can be like Adam in the garden again, conversing with God once more.

"making peace by the blood of His cross" - this is the way in which Christ accomplishes this reconciliation. His death and resurrection, his work on the cross to take our sin and atone for us.

## **A potential problem**

In these 6 verses we've seen Jesus Christ the creator and the redeemer. But there's possibly a slight issue we see with this. In fact, for many people, there is a glaring problem that puts them off Christianity entirely.

God creates the world - so far so good. But then things go wrong. So God redeems, saves, the world. The problem is this - if God's so clever, why didn't he make a world without the everything going wrong part? Or if that wasn't the plan, how could an omnipotent God be so shortsighted?

I want to explore whether this is God's plan from the beginning, and whether it's a good one.

So why the fall?

## **We don't know**

The first answer, and maybe the least satisfying, is that we don't know, but we can trust that God is good and has good reasons, whether we understand them or not. I think we can do better than just this answer, but it is important that we take this answer seriously. God's purposes and plans are beyond our understanding. Isaiah 55 (verses 8 and 9) puts it like this:

*8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.  
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

We should tread very carefully when we examine God's ways and especially if we seek to find fault in them.

## **Free will**

Another answer to the question of the fall that we might be drawn to is the idea of free will. The argument goes that in order to give humanity free will, this requires allowing humanity to sin - to exercise free will in turning from God. So if God didn't explicitly ordain the Fall, at least he must have had to allow it or else simply be the creator of automatons, rather than real people.

I don't think this answer is all that satisfying. Firstly, free will doesn't necessarily entail evil or sin. Did Adam have free will before he sinned? Will we in our resurrected bodies, cleansed of all sin, still have free will? And most starkly, I think we could all agree that God has free will, but does no evil.

Secondly, human choices are not beyond God's foreknowledge and control. As we've read, Christ is above all things, he supreme over every heavenly and earthly power. Proverbs 21 verse 1 says similarly:

*The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD;  
he turns it wherever he will.*

Thirdly, we see in scripture that the fall makes us slaves to sin. Rather than increased free will through the fall, we see decreased free will - creatures unable to choose God. Jesus says in John 8 (verse 34):

*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.*

I don't think we find that free will is a satisfying solution to the problem of the fall. Let's step back from the question of why the fall, and look at a broader question. Why does God do anything? What is God's ultimate purpose?

## **God's ultimate purpose**

God's purpose is not primarily to promote human happiness. That's a secondary concern. His primary goal is his own glory - He is the greatest good and the ultimate purpose. Look at Ephesians chapter 1. You might be familiar with Paul's outlining of how we are chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven. Verse 6 tells us something of the why - "to the praise of his glorious grace". Verses 12 and 14 further tell us we saved to be "to the praise of his glory".

Consider Jesus' prayer in John 17. He starts off focused on the importance of God's glory, and everything he prays for after this is flowing from this. John 17:1-5:

*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

The first and most important thing that Jesus considered is glorifying God. His ultimate purpose is the glory of God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit - God's ultimate purpose is his own glory.

God's overarching purpose in all He does is the manifestation of His glory and the delighting of all creatures in His divine splendour.

So if God's prime purpose is his own glory - in creation and redemption - why allow the fall? Logically and chronologically, the fall comes between creation and redemption. Without creation, no fall. Without the fall, no redemption. Salvation presupposes sin and sin presupposes a fall.

The answer is that redemption is a greater display of God's glory than mere creation. The fall was great evil, but redemption was greater good. Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, adoption into God's family, union with Christ, all greater good, all more glorifying to God than there could be without the fall.

Romans 9:22-24 shows us something of this:

*22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*

If the fall had happened and God had no plan to save the world, then yes, it would have been bad. But God allowed, no ordained, the fall, knowing his plan of salvation and knowing He would restore all things. A world with no fall and no salvation is less God glorifying than a world with a tragic fall but also a wondrous salvation. This was the plan from the beginning - the fall was no mistake.

God allows the fall for the same reasons he does anything at all: **for his glory.**

## **The redeemed world better than the original**

Another way we can see how redemption is glorifying to God is by comparing the world before the fall to the world after all is reconciled. Is the Garden of Eden at all like the world we will live in with Christ at the resurrection?

We sometimes talk about how God will restore things to how they were before the fall, a return to Eden. This is not incorrect, but it's also not complete.

As we've seen, Eden was not intended to be the end of the story - Adam was commanded to subdue the Earth, and rule over it - it needed stewarding and tending. It was incomplete. Eden was not so much perfect as it was a place of great potential. It was unspoiled, but also unfinished. It did not yet reach the ends of the earth, but needed man to multiply and expand it. It's a picture of the new earth to come.

But the new heavens and new earth will be far more glorious - we see some of what this looks like at the end of Revelation. Whilst we don't have the full details - they are likely beyond our comprehension anyway - we do read that we will have no need for the sun, because the glory of God will illuminate all. Rather than just hear God, as Adam and Eve did in the garden, we will see him face to face. The rivers flowing through Eden were just rivers, ordinary water. The river flowing that we see in Revelation 22 is the river of life.

We're not merely looking forward to a restoration of what Eden once was. Instead, we're looking forward to the consummation of all that Eden could be, as Jesus Christ succeeds where Adam failed.

In the long run, this time on Earth in the fallen world will be short - eternity will be all the richer because of what God has done.

## The image of God

Let's return to the start of our passage and something we sort of skipped over earlier, but that might illuminate some of what we've thought about. Verse 15:

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

This verse says that He, that is the Son of God Jesus Christ, is the image of the invisible God. We saw in Hebrews 1 (verse 3) that, for eternities past, Christ is:

*...the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature...*

Not just like God, but the exact imprint. He is of the very being of the Father. When he appears we do not see just a faint echo of divinity, but we see the very nature of God. Think of when His disciple Philip asks Jesus in John 14 to show him the Father, Jesus replies (verse 9):

*Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.*

He is the very expression of the Father, the perfect image of the invisible God. It is in Christ that we see the God we are to glorify. In his life, death and resurrection, we see the most glorious being of all - God himself. What was invisible became visible, that we might see for ourselves God's glory.



## Adam and Christ

But you may be thinking that this isn't the only place we hear this phrase. Who else is 'the image of God'? Genesis 1 (verse 27):

*So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;*

We are all in the image of God - though I don't want to explore that now. I want to look at Adam, the first man, who was created in the image of God and how he relates to God's plan for all time to both create and redeem.

Paul describes Adam as the type or pattern of the one to come (Romans 5:14). In other words, the first Adam is a picture of what Christ, the last Adam, is like.

Adam might be more literally the firstborn of creation - not in terms of supremacy, but in terms of actually being the first created man. Christ, we have seen is the firstborn from the dead - the firstborn of the resurrected human race.

Adam is given dominion over all the earth - told to rule over the creatures of the earth. Christ, actually rules and reigns over all.

In the beginning, we are being shown the end of humanity. Adam serves as an illustration of Him to whom every knee will bow and every creature submit, the last Adam, the everlasting King of all.

Luke 3:38, the end of Jesus' genealogy as it reaches the furthest back, says:

*the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.*

Adam was created the son of God, specifically to be like, to mirror or reflect, the uncreated Son of God. Adam was made to enjoy the love and care of the Father, in the same way as the Son of God has always enjoyed.

Now we know how Adam's story goes - chapter 2 of Genesis is alright, but chapter 3, sin enters the world through Adam. In his sin, Adam serves as not so much a direct image of God, but a mirror image, an opposite. Where Christ is sinless and perfect and in complete relationship with God, Adam is sinful and imperfect and rebellious against God. Adam does not love God anymore and does not do what he commands, whereas Christ fulfils God's commands perfectly and loves God perfectly (which is the greatest commandment of course (Mark 12:28-34)).

Now before the fall as well, we see one more aspect in which Adam reflects Christ.

In Genesis chapter 2, Adam's marriage. God puts Adam in a strange deep sleep - a death-like sleep, in a world before death and suffering - and from a wound in Adam's side is built a woman, his bride. She comes from him and they become one - husband and wife. In Adam's marriage, we see a reflection of Christ and the church.

In Adam, we see all the telltale signs of things to come, even the sacrifice of Christ for his bride. Far from being unexpected, the fall was God's plan from the beginning and his creation was set in motion to accomplish not just his creative ends, but his redemptive ends, all to his glory. Even the fall itself hints at the redemption to come - at a tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam sinned, failed to protect his bride and doomed humanity to death. Then at a tree, the cross, Christ obeyed, rescued his bride and defeated death.

All of humanity is contained in these two men - Adam, the head of the old humanity, the fallen humanity, Christ the head of the new, the redeemed humanity. The fate of all are found in one of these two men.

## Conclusion

We are either headed for an eternity of glorifying God, enjoying Christ and his goodness, doing what we were made for, or else an eternity of rejecting God - an unsatisfying forever because we reject our very purpose.

The goal of all creation is God's glory - Christ's preeminence over all things as we see in Colossians. True human happiness finds its fulfilment in God's supreme goodness and beauty. But sinful man, who sets his eyes on his own glory, cannot bear the idea of this. The degree to which we no longer recoil at the idea that the highest end is God's glory is something of a litmus test of our own sanctification.

So in conclusion, set your eyes on Christ, the creator and redeemer, for whom we were made and through whom we find our purpose and being.

Romans 11:36:

*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.  
Amen.*