



Date: March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Title: The Person and Work of Jesus

#2 in the Series on the Letter to the Colossians

## 1. Reminders and Review

- a. Be aware of heresies; 2 Pet. 2:1, *"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction."*
  - i. Arianism, *"the Son of God did not always exist, but was created by—and is therefore distinct from—God the Father."* Jesus less than God but more than human. (Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, )
  - ii. Gnosticism *"teaches an equal dualism of good and bad and special knowledge for salvation."* Gnosticism thus rests on personal religious experience.
    1. *"the Gnostics were "seekers." It was far more important to seek God through all kinds of knowledge rather than "just believe." They were believers in Christ, but they heard a different message from Jesus. They had beliefs, as we all do, but they did not insist they had the corner on -- or final -- truth in interpreting the world or God. Christ's message was more spiritual than religious -- not bearing all the answers. The place to find God was within oneself, not in externals like beliefs, dogma, or dictates of the church. Their interpretation was that we could experience the living Christ and God, by seeking, not finalizing God. Your faith is not what you believe about Christ but your relationship with Him."* [Gnostic Christians; A Different Way of Being Christian]
  - iii. Docetism, *"Jesus is divine, but only seems to be human;"* His humanity and suffering only seemed to be real. (Islam)
  - iv. Monophysitism, *"Jesus has only one nature: divine."* Jesus was a God with human attributes; he had one (mono) dominant divine nature.
  - v. Nestorianism, *"Jesus Christ, who is not identical with the Son but personally united with the Son, who lives in him, is one hypostasis and one nature: human. Jesus is two distinct persons."* Nestorius believed that Mary was mother only of the human Jesus, not the divine Logos.

## 2. The role of Christ within the created order

- a. v. 15 - *"He is the image of the invisible God..."*
  - i. The Greek *"eikon"* has two meanings, if Paul meant that Jesus was merely similar to the Father, he would have used the ancient Greek word *"homoionoma,"* which speaks merely of similar appearance.
    1. *"Likeness"* as in the image on a coin or the reflection in a mirror.
    2. *"Manifestation"* with the sense that God is fully revealed in Jesus.

- ii. Nicene creed, *"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father."*
- iii. According to Barclay, the ancient Jewish philosopher Philo equated the *"eikon"* of God with the *"Logos."* Paul used this important and meaningful word with great purpose.
- b. v. 15 - *"...the firstborn over all creation."* Also used of Jesus in Col. 1:18, Rom. 8:29, Heb. 1:6, and Rev. 1:5.
  - i. Greek *"prototokos"* describes either priority in time or supremacy in rank. Paul most likely used it here with both ideas in mind: Jesus being before all created things and Jesus being of a supremely different order than all created things.
  - ii. The ancient Rabbis called Yahweh Himself *"Firstborn of the World."* [Rabbi Bechai, cited in Lightfoot] Ancient rabbis also used firstborn as a Messianic title, *"God said, as I made Jacob a first-born, so also will I make King Messiah a first-born."* [R. Nathan in *Shemoth Rabba*, cited in Lightfoot]
  - iii. Paul's claim about Christ's *"birth"* is not to be taken literally, as Arius did in the early fourth century or as the Jehovah's Witnesses do today.
- c. v. 16 - *"For by Him all things were created..."*
  - i. *"...that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible..."*
    - 1. A single human chromosome contains twenty billion bits of information. If the DNA out in just one person's body was stretched, it would measure nearly 744 million miles! This means it could go all the way to the Sun and back 4 times! The moon is 250,000 miles away, so your DNA could also go there over 1500 times.
    - 2. The Greek of *"all things were created"* has the idea of *"stand created"* or *"remain created."* Robertson adds: *"The permanence of the universe rests, then, on Christ far more than on gravity. It is a Christ-centric universe."* [A.T. Robertson]
  - ii. *"...whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers."*
    - 1. Paul emphasizes that whatever ranks of spirit beings there may be, Jesus created them all and they all ultimately answer to Him.
    - 2. The Colossian Heresy seemed taken with an angelology, effectively placing angels as mediators between God and man.
- d. v. 16 - *"All things were created through Him and for Him."*
  - i. Jn. 1:1-3, 14, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*
- e. v. 17 - *"And He is before all things..."*
  - i. Centuries after Paul, a dangerous (yet popular) teacher named Arius claimed that Jesus was not truly God and that there was a time when He did not exist. Paul rightly understood and insisted that Jesus is before all things and is Himself the beginning.

- ii. Jn. 8:58, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."*
- f. v. 17 - *"...and in Him all things consist."*
  - i. Jesus is both the unifying principle and the personal sustainer of all creation. *"Hence, God, as the Preserver, is as necessary to the continuance of all things, as God the Creator was to their original production. But this preserving or continuing power is here ascribed to Christ."* (Clarke)
  - ii. Acts 17:28, *"for in Him we live and move and have our being..."*
- 3. The role of Christ within the new order of his kingdom
  - a. v. 18 - *"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead..."*
  - b. v. 18 - *"...that in all things He may have the preeminence."*
  - c. v. 19 - *"For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell..."*
    - i. Greek word *"pleroma,"* is *"a recognized technical term in theology, denoting the totality of the Divine powers and attributes."* [Lightfoot, cited in Robertson] Refers here to the Divine nature dwelling in the man Christ Jesus.
    - ii. The word *"pleroma"* was used by the Gnostic teachers in a technical sense, to express the sum-total of divine powers and attributes. *"Christ may have been ranked with these inferior images of the divine by the Colossian teachers. Hence the significance of the assertion that the totality of the divine dwells in Him."* [Vincent] *"The Gnostics distributed the divine powers among various aeons. Paul gathers them all up in Christ, a full and flat statement of the deity of Christ."* [Robertson]
    - iii. Jn. 1:14, 16, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... And of His fullness we have all received..."*
  - d. v. 20 - *"...and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."*
    - i. We need to keep in mind that the centrality of the crucifixion for Paul was a radical and intensely controversial claim in his day.
    - ii. We don't make our own peace with God, but Jesus made peace for us through His work on the cross; the shedding of His blood.
    - iii. Blood is the priesthood's central image of covenant renewal. The blood of animal sacrifice (cf. Lev. 1-16) was symbolic of eternal life and the promise of God's covenant with Israel. For Paul, Christ's shed blood is symbolic of the church's covenant with God for eternal life. (cf. Heb. 9-10).
    - iv. The cross refers partially to the scandal of hanging an offender from a *"tree."* (compare Dt. 27:26 and Gal. 3:13)
    - v. The cross is more political; Jesus' Roman death only underscored his fidelity to God's purposes. (cf. Rom 3:21-25) Rather than symbolizing his betrayal of Judaism or of Rome, the cross symbolizes foremost Jesus' loyalty to God. The cross becomes the public symbol of the

Messiah's fidelity to God's redemptive promises and *"triggers, as a result, the disclosure of God's empowering grace within history."* (cf. Rom 3:21-22; Gal 2:16-21; 3:22).

- vi. Reconciled with God equals Peace.
- vii. God's reconciliation of *"all things"* takes in the nonhuman and inanimate worlds, so that *"even the stones will cry out"* in worship of God. (cf. Luke 19:40, Rev. 21:19-21) We may not know how God will restore the entire natural world; it is unwise to limit God's reconciliation to the human order of creation, for that denies grace its unconditional and universal character.

#### 4. Take-aways

- a. Be aware of heresies
- b. The fight against heresies; we read in Eccl. 1:9, *"That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun."*
- c. Jesus is the image and the fullness of God
- d. All things were created for, through and by Him
- e. All things are reconciled through Jesus and His blood

This theological conviction implies a practical point as well: the redeemed community is a new creation, and the current demonstration that God's grace has reconciled and reintegrated all things spiritual with all things material in accord with God's will.

Whirlpool Galaxy is located about 23 million light-years away in the constellation Canes Venatici and is aligned almost perfect face on. We have beautiful view of the Whirlpool Galaxy's entire structure, from its spiral arms to its dense galactic core.

*"Do you believe other gospels, contemporary with those in the Bible, ought to be heard? Do you question certain articles in the Apostles' Creed, such as the virgin birth and bodily resurrection? Do you believe other religions other than Christianity have validity? Do you accept that women have the right to be clergy? Is your personal relationship to God more important than believing what you are told to believe? Is your way of faith honestly seeking what is true for the world and God? Do you believe Christ's call was to a dynamic faith rather than to any system of beliefs? If you answered "yes" to a majority of these questions, you will find that the Gnostic Gospels support a different way to be Christian. These long lost, hidden, writings, as do the gospels in the Bible, lift up the power and love of Christ. This book explains how and why!"* [Book summary of *"The Hidden Messages of Jesus; How the Gnostic Gospels Change Christianity"*]

Steve Chalke, *"God is a cosmic child abuser... a stark 'unmasking' of the violent, pre-Christian thinking behind such a theology."*