

COLOSSIANS 1:15-19 | THE ETERNAL NATURE OF THE SON

Note: I have put these verses in blue (directly applicable to us), considering them to be trans-dispensational truth for all ages.

VERSE 15 -

Paul begins his description of the Messiah as the Son of God (compare vv. 12-13), referring to Him as "the image of the invisible God". This is a significant expression as it sets the standard of orthodoxy related to God the Father, a segment of theology often referred to as "theology proper."

First, it establishes that God has a Son. Second, it clarifies that the Son is distinct from the Father. Third, it explains that while the Son is not the Father, He is the "image" (using the Greek word εἰκών [eikon]) of God, who is invisible. Therefore, when you see the Son, you're essentially seeing the Father, echoing Jesus's own words in John 14:9, where Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

The statement that the Son is the image of the Father is also supported by Hebrews 1:3, which states, "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

While one could argue that Jesus, being described as simply the "image" of God, is therefore not God Himself and should not be worshipped, the remainder of this passage (vv. 15-19) makes this claim quite challenging. The subsequent verses continue to affirm the divine and eternal nature of Christ, and thus worthy of worship.

Yet, it's important to acknowledge that Adam, too, was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). One could argue that a distinction should be made between being the image of God (as Jesus is described) and being created in the image of God (as Adam was). But such an argument could be accused of being a form of verbal gymnastics. Was Adam made in God's image? Yes. Is Christ the image of God? Yes. Is Adam considered a child (son) of God? Yes, as stated in Luke 3:38. Is Jesus the Son of God? Yes, as confirmed in verse 13 of this chapter.

So, does this establish enough distinction to claim that Jesus is "just a man?" It's a legitimate question. However, what must be understood is that Jesus IS a man, as part of the concept of incarnation in trinitarian theology. Therefore, it should not be surprising when Jesus appears "man-like." To conclude that He is a man is a valid conclusion, as He took on a nature like ours (as mentioned in Hebrews 2:14). However, to conclude that He is not God would be a false conclusion, as it ignores the remainder of this text, in addition to many others.

Verse 15 also claims Jesus to be the "firstborn of every creature." This statement has been the subject of much debate and often misunderstood due to the term "firstborn" (πρωτότοκος [prototokos]). Some have interpreted it to mean that Jesus was the first being God created.

While the term "firstborn" can often be understood in its usual sense, denoting chronology, it is not its only meaning. In Exodus 4:22, for instance, Israel is referred to as "my firstborn," despite the fact that Israel was far from the first nation God created. This usage of "firstborn" emphasizes not chronology but a status of special significance or priority. Moreover, in Romans 8:29, the term is used again in a similar context, where Jesus is described as "the firstborn among many brethren." Again, "firstborn" here does not point to a chronological order but rather to a status of preeminence or priority.

If one were to take "firstborn" in its standard sense, implying that Jesus was the first being God created, it require a robust argument that dealt with John 1:1-3, which states that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." In essence, one

would have to argue that Jesus was created before "the beginning." Furthermore, passages like Revelation 1:8, in which Jesus claims to be "the beginning" would pose a challenge; can something be prior to "the beginning?"

VERSE 16 -

Paul continues to answer the question of why Jesus holds the status of preeminence as the "firstborn" in verse 16. The preeminence of Jesus is solidified by the fact that He is the Creator of all things in all realms. Paul states that not only did He create everything, but everything was created "for Him." This signifies that the ultimate purpose of all creation is to glorify and serve Jesus. Regardless of one's understanding or interpretation of the Trinity, the point remains: if you are a created being, you have been created by Jesus and for Jesus. Therefore, it is befitting and necessary to worship Jesus.

VERSE 17 -

Clarifying the "firstborn" status, Paul now says that Christ is "before" all things. This particular Greek word, *πρὸ* [*pro*], can be used both chronologically and in rank.

A chronological example of its usage can be found in Matthew 5:12, where Jesus says, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before [*πρὸ*] you." Here, the use of *πρὸ* [*pro*] signifies those who came before in time, indicating a chronological order.

An example of its use to denote rank can be found in James 5:12, where it is said, "But above [*πρὸ*] all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment." In this case, the term *πρὸ* [*pro*] is used to indicate the priority or importance of honest communication in our interactions.

Thus, when Paul states that Christ is "before" all things, he is not only acknowledging the pre-existence of Christ before all creation, but also affirming the supreme authority and rank of Christ over all creation.

Paul concludes verse 17 with the statement, "And by Him all things consist." The word "consist" is *συνίστημι* [*sunhistami*], which was partially borrowed, with Latinization, into the English word "consist." Both words carry the meaning of "standing together."

This indicates that Jesus is not only the creator of all things but also the sustainer. It is through Him that the universe is held together, maintaining its existence and order.

There's an interesting conjecture that can be made here, perhaps pointing to a yet undiscovered property of physics. Given that Jesus is the creator, it's plausible that the energy which holds particles together today is sourced in its Creator, Jesus Christ. This interpretation aligns with the concept of a universe finely tuned for life, where even the most minute alterations in physical laws and constants could result in a universe incapable of supporting life.

While this is a matter of faith and not empirically provable, it showcases the profound implications of Paul's assertion. Jesus is not simply a distant and detached Creator; He is intimately involved in the ongoing existence of the universe, holding all things together.

VERSE 18 -

Paul continues, explaining that Jesus is "the head," a figurative reference to Christ, and "the body," symbolizing "the church." This statement holds true whether referring to "the body of Christ," which is the most reasonable interpretation, or any "church" (i.e., assembly) throughout history: Christ is the head.

Paul further refers to Jesus as "the beginning", once again underscoring His preeminence. However, if one were to interpret this chronologically, as we discussed earlier in verse 15, it could get complicated. The interpretation would then have to be something along the lines of, "The creation of Jesus initiated 'the beginning', and nothing is known prior to His creation. Then, once that beginning commenced in the creation of Jesus, all other things were created by Jesus." Trying to reconcile this interpretation with John 1:1, which unequivocally states that Jesus already "was" when "the beginning" began, becomes quite challenging.

Yet, as we stated earlier, such an argument becomes, it seems, only a theological exercise, since "in Him all things consist" and thus we must find our being in Him, and worship Him, whether He be eternal (as I contend) or a created Being.

Additionally, verse 17 refers to Jesus as "the firstborn from the dead". This further underscores the interpretation of "firstborn" as indicating preeminence, not chronology. Jesus was neither the first person to die, nor the first to be resurrected. In fact, in the gospels, we read of Jesus Himself resurrecting others, like Lazarus, prior to His own resurrection. Therefore, the term "firstborn" here cannot be understood in a chronological sense. Instead, this aligns with Romans 14:9, which describes Jesus as "Lord both of the dead and living". In other words, Jesus holds preeminence over both realms - He has authority over life and death.

Paul concludes, as we have been arguing, that Jesus has preeminence in all things.

VERSE 19 -

In verse 19, the King James Version (KJV), alongside other versions of the Bible, uses the phrase "it pleased [the Father]" to begin the verse. This phrase has led to some interpretations that it was the Father's decision "all fullness" dwell in the Son, Jesus.

However, a closer look at the original Greek text and the grammatical structure of the sentence indicates that "all fullness" is actually the subject of the sentence and "was pleased" is the verb. This means that the text is not expressing the Father's decision or action, but rather describing a state or condition of "all fullness."

So, a more accurate understanding of the verse might be: "[The Father] was pleased that all fullness dwell in Him [Jesus]." This interpretation reflects the concept that the entirety of God's nature, is pleased to dwell in Jesus. This aligns with the broader biblical affirmation of the full divinity of Jesus Christ.

To avoid any misinterpretation, it is essential to clarify that God the Father did not decide to place His fullness into Jesus at a certain point in time. Instead, this arrangement - the fullness of God dwelling in Jesus - has been an eternal state. God the Father takes pleasure in this arrangement. This understanding aligns with the consistent biblical affirmation of Jesus Christ's full divinity.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE COLOSSIAN CHRISTOLOGY

When engaging in discussions on the doctrine of the Trinity, we may find ourselves mired in the complexities and nuances of theological interpretation. The minute details of Trinitarian doctrine can be challenging to substantiate unambiguously from the text alone. Yet, it is crucial to remember that the theme of this passage, as well as other Christological texts, is the preeminence of Jesus. Such is clear and consistent throughout the scriptures.

Many arguments against the concept of the Trinity aim to diminish the status of Christ and His position of authority and preeminence. Therefore, we should focus less on defending the minutiae of the theologian's Trinitarian doctrine and more on reaffirming Christ's preeminence, a fact unequivocally supported by the scriptures.

By emphasizing Christ's preeminence, we can direct the discussion towards the central message of the Bible: the person and work of Christ. This approach keeps us from getting lost in the minutiae and helps us to maintain our focus on the essential truth of the preeminence of Christ.