

The Vastness of Christ; His Supremacy and Sufficiency

By Jay Wegter

If we don't exalt Christ as unifier and goal of all reality, we sentence ourselves to a fragmented view of life (obsessed with particulars with an inordinate concern with temporal things). ***Our great need is to have our thoughts, affections, aligned with God's great purpose that Christ should have first place in everything***. We must by Scripture meditation and proclamation regularly 'part the heavens' to behold Him who is the Lord of glory, feeding our faith on Christ's preeminence and supremacy. For the world today appears to be spiraling out of control with evil, filth, and cruel lies. Thus, it takes a vigorous faith to 'see' Jesus enthroned above all authority and power—to see Christ as *Logos*, Cosmic King of the universe, ruling now in perfect control from glory.

The church hungers for views of her heavenly King and husband—that:

- In Him is all the fullness of Deity in bodily form; each believer is complete in Him.
- He is Head over all rule and authority and conqueror of malevolent spirits
- All of the storehouses of divine wisdom and knowledge are in Him
- He is the center of all of God's purposes
- He is the Reconciler of mankind and creation and the consummation of history.

Therefore, argues Paul, it is irrational to attempt, through any form of spiritual practice to experience God, join oneself to Him, or please God—except through Christ. According to **Colossians 1-2**, the only all-sufficient bridge between self-existent holy God and the finite polluted creature is Christ. As creatures made in God's image—only Christ, the perfect image of God can conduct a believing sinner safely into the presence of God. ***Christ Hymn, we study Christ's supremacy learn of His sufficiency***.

I. Christ has first place in creation -- V. 15 – **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”** Christ is the *eikon* of God – This echoes Christ's words in **John 14:9**, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” As the “image of God,” Christ is the great and final theophany (revelation—what God is like), or literal manifestation of God. He is the projection of God onto the canvas of our humanity.

V. 16 – **“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.”** *All things created in Him* means that creation not only finds its origin in Christ, but it is centered in Christ. He was the location from whom all came into being, and *in whom* all creation is contained. ***All laws and purposes which guide creation and govern the universe (to the furthest galaxy) reside in Him. Christ's creative work is all-encompassing, for it includes all***

created things “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.” He is not in all things (*pantheism*), but all things are in Him. His majesty and might and transcendence **uphold the universe**, all things find their source, sustenance, purpose, destiny, and order in Him. All things are created *for Him*—they abide to that end. The Son is the goal of the existence of all things. The region they occupy makes no difference—it is still true! Whether in heaven or on earth, even angels have no power apart from Christ. Thus, nothing in creation is worthy of worship—Christ having created angels, makes angel worship heretical—**2:18**.

The vastness of Christ—in order to be in awe of Christ’s vastness and immensity, you must know these treasures Paul is expounding—you must know Christ’s relation to all creation. The majesty of Jesus exposes the pathetic smallness of pagan spirituality. For the very spirits created by Christ owe the very ground of their being to Christ, the Father’s Agent of created reality. **The supremacy of Christ in both arenas of reality (heavenly; invisible, and earthly; visible—stands in direct contrast to every false teaching.** Everything has its being for His sake. He shall realize every purpose of His heart—for He is the Ruler of creation, the Owner of creation, and the goal of creation.

V. 17 – “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” All is unified by Him. All things are defined in relation to Him. The Creator of all things maintains all things—the unity in nature, the order of all things, and the flow of history—is all traced to Christ—Creator, Sustainer, Upholder. **The reason the world is a cosmos and not a chaos is because of Him. This world is a system with a plan because of Him. From the smallest living cell to the blue whale, to the monarch butterfly—each creature occupies its appointed ecological niche due to God’s guiding hand in Christ.** Christ is the cause of creation and He upholds creation—being the very *bond* that holds creation together; His power is continually exerted in doing so (**Heb 1:3**).

II. Christ has first place in redemption -- **V. 18** – “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” How we need to constantly consider the dignity of the Person who took our iniquities and infirmities upon Himself. Christ is *Firstborn, Point of reference, Agent of creation, Goal of creation, Forerunner, Governor, Head of the Body, the Beginning of the creation of God, Firstborn from the dead, first in the realm of the visible and the invisible*. He is the “beginning” the origin of creation, and also, by His death on the cross He established a *new beginning*—the beginning of redemption for mankind. His death and resurrection signaled the dawning of an age in which individuals would enjoy a closer personal relationship to Him than ever before.

As *first-born from the dead*, He possesses authority and dominion over yet another aspect of this world—He is supreme over death. Having conquered death by His resurrection, He holds “the keys of death and hell” (Rev 1:18). ***Paul pointed out the purpose of this—that “Christ would have first place in everything” (v. 18).*** In the church, in creation, in salvation, and even in death and resurrection, Christ holds the title and privileges of the Firstborn—Heir of all. There is no reality greater than Christ.

V. 19 – “For it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him. . .”
“For” – God the Father’s design is that He should reveal himself in Christ. And that He would do so by executing all of His purposes by Him. In Christ the fullness of grace and power reside (the totality of divine attributes and might). This is by divine design, every aspect of Christ’s suitability to be our perfect Savior has been thought through by the Godhead. ***All the fullness of salvation dwells in Christ. “For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” The Father, is pleased to have all redemptive power dwell in Christ who is the Agent and goal of reconciliation (v. 20).***

V. 20 – “...and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” **To reconcile means to exchange hostility for friendship.** God’s reconciling of man to Himself is necessary because of the enmity of sinners toward God in their natural mind (Rom 5:8-11; 8:5-7; Col 1:21). Man’s corruption is an effrontery to God’s justice; sin requires reconciliation before relations can be restored (the alienation must be mended). The reconciliation of sinners who are saved is spoken of as: “Having made peace.” Reconciliation is not a cosmic miracle (of fiat legislation) in which the universe is changed outside of man. “For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:21).

It is staggering to our intellects that God should reconcile the cosmos through the murder of the Son of man on a wooden cross (beams of a cedar tree He Himself had created). Through the blood of His cross the sin principle is conquered—the curse is borne, the law satisfied, peace is made and restored. But this is only because the God-man who dies is *maker, upholder, owner, ruler, and goal of the universe*. This rocks us as well as ravishes us. Oh the immensity, the vastness, the dignity and majesty of the One who took our place. Through Christ and His cross, the universe is brought back to its proper relation to God. Jesus is first, and Founder of a new humanity. By His God-ordained supremacy He rules. As a just reward for His obedience Christ is exalted to God’s right hand—He receives the Church whom He purchased, and from this position of exaltation and power—He rules the universe.

III. Christ has first place in judgment. V. 20 cont. *What He accomplished at the cross, He will consummate at the second advent when He formally and militantly takes back the title deed to the earth.* At present, heaven and earth are not now united. Kingdoms are in conflict, sin brought the universe into a state of corruption, decay, deterioration. God, in reconciling all things, has given Christ the power of administration, to make every enemy His ‘footstool’—to subject all things to Himself (**1 Cor 15:24-28**). ***But, in what sense does Christ reconcile all things to Himself?*** All things reconciled by His blood cannot mean universal salvation. The reconciliation in this verse points to ***the Great White Throne judgment*** at the end of the millennium when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father (**Phil 2:10; Rom 14:11**).

By Christ’s rule, all creation is unstoppably moving toward this goal. Someday the world will fully recognize the preeminence and sovereignty of Christ (**1 Cor 15:25; Phil 2:10-11; Rev 19:16**). And the very public revelation of His preeminence in judgment and restoration will in itself consummate the ages—everything will ***be summed up in Him*** (every created thing, every virtue, every sin) ***evaluated by the relation*** they bear to Christ (**Eph 1:10**). He will pronounce the eternal destiny of every rational creature. Every enemy will be judged and made a footstool (**1 Cor 15:23-28**).

The “Christ hymn” of 1:15-20 is a powerful statement about the Person of Christ and His work. Christ’s supremacy is seen at every turn. The first portion focuses on His preeminent role in creation, while the second emphasizes His work as Redeemer and Judge. For any who are confused or fuzzy about Christ’s role in the world—these six verses (**vv. 15-20**) testify to Christ’s absolute authority.

The vastness of His Person gives us insight into the marvelous dimensions of His work—we gaze in awe at the supremacy of His Person to learn more of the sufficiency of His saving work. The lowly salamander, the mushroom, the angel, the mountain peak, the storm cloud, the bridesmaid—all created reality exists to exalt Christ. His glory is creation’s goal. It is the vastness of His Person that dignifies the all-sufficiency and efficacy of His work.

The sufficiency of Christ refutes the Colossian heresy, as well as all false religion: Paul thunders out three pervasive realities which overturn the doctrinal heresies that were plaguing Colossae:

- **All the fullness of deity dwells in Christ**
- **Believers are complete in Christ**
- **Christ is the authority over all creation including angels**

Paul's affirmation that the believer is complete in Christ (2:10-14) is significant in light of the Colossian error that ***identification with Christ is less than sufficient for the Christian life***. If the Colossians could see the supremacy of Christ, there would be no need to bow and scrape before spirit forces; Christ reverses the trajectory of the pagan myth of gnosis (secret knowledge) and the veneration of angels. God entered humanity and became accessible to us in Christ.

You can't understand the cross until you know the One who died upon it. He who is transcendent to creation condescended to become one of us—the Great Insider—to live the life of a creature in order to bring us to God. ***No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' but by (apart from) the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3)***. Even Peter's confession, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:13-17) required the revelation of God to his mind. The soul-thrilling concept that Christ is: Son of God and Son of man requires a regenerating work of the Spirit. Only then does the true identity of Christ burst upon our understanding so that we fall at His feet as our Savior and Lord.

Because Christ is central and preeminent—His work on behalf of sinners is all sufficient. If His sufficiency were had not been attacked so soon after His ascension, many of the N.T. epistles would not have been written. But praise God they were written. Let this be a lesson to us—in every age of church history there is a tendency to lose sight of the majesty of Christ. So infinite is the gap between Holy God and sinful man that only the God-man in His supremacy can bring us all the way to God. He who is cosmic King preeminent in all things is perfectly fit to reconcile us to God and to bring us from dust to glory. This is the theme of Colossians.

Colossians and the Glory of Christ:

What is the glory of Christ that the church was saved to behold? Christ's glory is expressed both ***in His Person*** (Who He is as the God-man), and ***in His work of redemption*** (what He has done to purchase His Bride). The glory of Christ is God's two-pronged wisdom: *Christ*, and *Him crucified* (His Person as the 'God-man', and His work as Redeemer) (1 Cor 2:2). **Christ's glory is the very goal of all existence because God the Father has determined that Christ should have first place in everything.** His Son has ***first place*** in creation (as Creator, Heir, all made 'for Him', upholds it, etc.). His Son has ***first place*** in redemption (Christ is first-born from the dead). His Son has ***first place*** in judgment (all judgment has been given to the Son, John 5:22-23, every knee shall bow, Philippians 2:9-11, all things will be reconciled and summed up in Him, Ephesians 1:10).

The glory of Christ is bound up in Him being God's Mystery, in whom are all of the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:2-3). In referring to the incarnation

of Christ (taking on our human nature in order to redeem the elect), Paul designates this taking on of flesh in order to save us as: *the mystery of godliness* (**1 Tim 3:16**). ‘Mystery’ is the truth hidden in the O.T. age and revealed in the N.T. concerning the truths of salvation and righteousness in Christ, which produce holiness in believers and perfect righteousness, all through Jesus Christ.

The two natures of Christ are a vital part of this glorious mystery of godliness. For in order for us to be saved, the nature that sinned (our human nature) must be punished by death under the wrath of God. And the nature that failed to obey (our human nature) must obey perfectly—that means obeying the law of God with perfect love to God and neighbor. This is what Christ did for our sake. “For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead” (**1 Cor 15:21**).

How deep is this mystery, for until the incarnation, the divine Son of God could not nurse as a baby. Until the incarnation, He could not cry real salty tears. Until the incarnation, He could not wash feet, or bleed and die. And, because Jesus has two natures, human and divine, it means He was able to still a storm with a word, feed 5000 from one boy’s lunch. Because He is one Person with two natures, what He does in His humanity counts as His whole Person doing it (whether, weeping, praying, suffering, or dying and rising). And what He does in His deity, placing an eyeball in an empty socket, or walking on water, counts as His single Person doing it. So because He is both human and divine, His death has infinite value: and could save a universe full of sinners if God so willed it. *We cannot grow past this over-arching truth that His supremacy as the God-man is the source of His sufficiency as the Savior.*

One of the necessary benefits of studying Colossians is to delve into the question: who really is our celestial Husband with Whom we are in union—who is this divine Person who loves enough to give His life’s blood for us? **We were created anew to behold this glory of the Lord, and to be transformed by it** (**2 Cor 3:18**). The communication of this glory without interruption is what will make heaven a place of endless bliss.

What are some of the symptoms of being malnourished on the glory of Christ? If we are not staggered and rocked by the glory of Christ, how will we be able to speak of His glory to others? How will we, who are created for the communication of His glory be able to tell of it? When we are starved for the sight of that glory, our calling as true worshippers becomes frustrated. Religion gets jammed into a shrunken compartment in our lives, and fragmentation results. The life of the soul withers. Circumstances yank us around so that our emotions are whipsawed all over the place. We find ourselves going to things that cannot cure and heal our brokenness; indulgence, escapism, cynicism, or we go the other direction: frenetic goal-setting, perfectionism,

and egoism. When malnourished on the glory of Christ we tend to be self-conscious, self-consumed, fragmented, with the remnants of our lower natures pulling us toward diversions. The world leaves us vacant, vain, despairing, it cannot satisfy a new creature, for we are made anew to behold the glory of the Lord.

When the glory of Christ is not regularly displayed and exhibited to the church, a kind of spiritual deadness/numbness sets in. Church life becomes routine, meetings an obligation, time with believers an exercise in shallow social needs. My friends the message of the book of Colossians is the cure. Many of you in your own Christian walk, have felt this *spiritual dryness* of just going through the motions, a state of unquenched thirst in which you are slogging up and down one sand dune after another without a shady oasis. The good news is we are going to find our well-watered oasis in the message of Colossians. And, the Christ Hymn of Colossians gives us a portrait of the glory of Christ. Puritans pastors 200 years ago said most Christians are living secretly defeated lives, what would they say about living in today's world?

What are the great healing benefits God intends for us when we behold the glory of Christ? Beholding His glory transforms us into Christ's likeness (**2 Cor 3:18**). It makes our burden light (**Mt 11:28-30**). The effect of beholding His glory creates the desire to forsake our lusts and selfish fleshly desires. For, when we see by faith, our human nature glorified in Christ, we see our glorious destiny—that an imperishable body like Christ's glorified body awaits us—a body perfectly suited to our glorious existence in the next world. This hope purifies (**1 Jn 3:1-3**). His glory delivers us from carnal self-focus and self-consciousness. His glory integrates and unifies our fragmented lives. It has a rectifying effect—that is, a fresh consecrated adjustment to the holiness of God, and to panting after the God of holiness. For beholding lifts us out of HVP and raises us up to DVP—perceiving by spiritual sight that *the Son has first place in everything*—that is the very essence of glory—we find that we are controlled by what really matters, the glory of the Lord. Self-forgetfulness in which we are stirred to love (**1 Tim 1:5**).

Benefits continued: in beholding the glory of the Lord, we become OK with His purposes (in this joyful resignation, our pain is not accidental, not without use, it is temporary, it gives us hope, for He is making all work together for the good of conforming us to the image of Christ—thus even our suffering is joined to His glory. Momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (**2 Cor 4:17-18**). Beholding Christ's glory lifts us out of a temporal focus—we gain clarity of spiritual sight—that under God's sovereign care, everything is moving the church toward that promise of gaining the glory of Christ, that is conformity to His image (**2 Thess 2:13-14**).

Why does beholding Christ's glory have such a powerful effect upon us? *Christ having first place in everything* is joined to God's gift of Himself. How would God give us Himself? He is invisible, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, no one has seen Him or can see Him (**Ex 33:20; Jn 1:18; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16; 1 Jn 4:12**). All communion with Him, and knowledge of Him must come through the Mediator. Christ mediates the Father to us, so that God through Christ imparts Himself as the greatest of all gifts. For, God has determined to commune with us after our human form (Isaac Ambrose). This is not a sidebar in human history; this is the very purpose of the ages. "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. **This was in accordance with the eternal purpose (purpose of the ages) which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,** in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him" (**Eph 3:8-12**). God's gift of Himself will bring us into the relational love of the Trinity (see **Jn 17:22-26**).

All the other religions in the world do not have a divine Savior, their religious traditions, might seek from their gods, health, or prosperity, but never a love relationship of mutuality (mutual self-giving). The false gods of this world cannot bring the worshipper into a love relationship of mutual ownership. Only in the gospel is this self-giving of love of God in mutual giving of one to the other.

This covenant love given to us in Christ was prefigured in Eve's creation. For Adam underwent a death-like sleep so that from the opening of his side his bride could be formed from his own flesh and bone (**Gen 2:23**). Christ underwent an agonizing death so that the Church could be formed through His wounds—taken from His wounded side. Think upon this, Christ, the glorious Lord of the cosmos, the One who created all things, and for Whom all things were created, and who upholds all things by the Word of His power is the One who became Jesus of Nazareth. A human being was brought into the heart of the Trinity so that you could live with God.

ROBE: The greatness of God's purpose stretches our ability to comprehend it. Think of it, that from His conception to His ascension, by His obedience He **wove a perfect robe**—so that when He finished weaving that robe, He would take it off to clothe you and me, His bride. We could not have everything pertaining to life and to righteousness unless we had been given this robe as our covering (**2 Pet 1:3**). Now the believer wears this robe woven by Christ, his Substitute—it is why we will be in heaven. **What is the state of our lives in which the gospel finds us?** Unfit for life with God, but the Savior says, I will clothe your defects. The gospel comes to us, up front

with God acting in freeness, out of pure grace. The love of the Savior speaks thus, “I will fit you for life in Me and with Me, I will be all your qualification for this incredible eternal love relationship with Me. I will cover you.”

The believer can say: ‘God is for me’; what a thought (Rom 8:31-32)! Because of God’s plan to glorify Himself in Christ, **God is *for God* in God being *for me*.** God’s plan of the ages is that *Christ have first place in everything*—my Savior and His work is the heart of God’s purpose to glorify Himself. Your heart must hunger for this—that God’s chosen place to show His glory is revealed in my Redeemer and in my redemption of unworthy sinners. This strong meat, must be the food of our souls if we are to grow to maturity in Christ.

You know what a commodity is, it is a product, an economic good which can be packaged, marketed, and purchased. Our proposition this morning is that Christianity without the glory of Christ at its center tends to move toward *commodification*—or a ‘glory-less’ version of Christianity. When the church is starved for the glory of Christ, religion can become reduced to a set of spiritual things, laws, rules, commodities, blessings for religious consumers.

Sometimes our language betrays our tendency to commodify the benefits of salvation: we can recite even in our sleep that: *those who have received Christ receive forgiveness, adoption, and eternal life*. But these infinite blessings of grace are not free-floating gifts, they are inseparable from the believer’s union with Christ. The true Christian possesses these eternal blessings because he is possessed by the Lord, is owned by Christ, is joined to Him.

[Pastors can feel in a bind when congregations are unmotivated, not volunteering, cold, detached, lethargic, stagnant—but guilt and shaming won’t work if the real problem is the need to see the glory of Christ. This glory of Christ equips the believer to be a physician of his own soul—he can see that this delicious, nourishing, strong meat has been missing in his spiritual diet.]

My quarrel with commodification is that it overshadows the awe and majesty of Christ, and replaces His preeminence with a set of spiritual laws and objectives to be managed and harnessed. The glory and transcendence of Christ cannot be controlled, managed, or commodified, in fact His glory destroys commodification. You cannot control, catalog, or commodify His glory and transcendence. For, His glory and transcendence produce trauma, wonder, worship, adoration, and awe in us.

If false religion is the attempt to protect ourselves from God—knowing conscience is an extension of His divine justice, then true religion is drawing near through my Savior who is all sufficient because He is absolutely supreme (*having first place in all things*).

Do we run to distractions rather than experience the tension of this relationship that is all of grace? Do these eternal blessings for the unworthy really exist? Does the God of the universe really want to meet with me? Am I more comfortable keeping my distance, versus stepping out in holy expectation that He desires my intimate fellowship? Can I honestly admit daring to continually draw near is contrary to all of my self-protection strategies? As we feed on the Word of life, the gospel, we slowly grow in courage to draw near.

The issue comes down to the private, subjective, upper story, ethereal, Jesus—versus the Lord of creation. Christ's relation to the creation anchors me in a Christocentric reality of the world. Paul began his address to the unsaved in **Acts 17** by explaining God's relationship to the created world. **Paganism** is idolatrous because it looks at the glory pointers in the creation which belong to Christ, and then worships these created things. But, as we have learned from the Christ Hymn, the creation was made by God to give praise, not receive it. In **Colossians 1:15-18**, Paul sets forth Christ's glory as His right to occupy *first place in everything*. In the Christ Hymn, the Apostle gives us three comprehensive regions of Christ's glory: ***His glory in creation, in redemption, and in judgment.***