

2. The Danger of a Half-Learned Christ

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[0 : 00] I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me to Paul's letter to the Colossians, which you will find in page 983 of the Bible on your pew.

Colossians chapter 1. We began last week a series in this letter that will take us through, God willing, to the end of August. And last week we studied the first 14 verses together. Today under consideration is chapter 1 verses 15 to 23. Let us read then the Word of God. He, that is Jesus, Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.

[1 : 17] He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless, and above reproach before him.

If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Amen. And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his word. I wonder if you read, or you saw in last week's newspaper, that some of the residents of the White Craigs area of Glasgow have been the victims of the awful crime of identity theft.

Their mail, their post had been intercepted or stolen from the mailboxes at the end of their driveway. And the information contained in these letters enabled the criminals to obtain credit cards and other credits in the victims' names.

[2 : 53] These criminals then bled these new accounts for every bit of credit they could get. One victim was stung to the tune of 15,000 pounds by the ruthless gang, who used his bank account to rip off the massive sum.

Now, identity theft involves assets that are rightfully yours being stolen from you without you even knowing that it is happening.

The term identity theft was first used in 1964, but the crime is not new. Spiritual identity theft has been employed by the devil against generations of God's people.

His aim, to steal people's identity in Jesus Christ. His method, through false teaching. The Colossians were in danger of falling victim to this crime, this scheme of the devil, and having their identities in Jesus Christ stolen.

We've seen last week in verses 1 to 14, there had been genuine Christian growth in Colossae. Paul gave thanks that they had got going in the gospel, but not content.

[4 : 08] Paul prayed that they would keep growing in the gospel. They had come to faith through the faithful preaching and teaching of Epaphras. They had come to genuine Christian faith.

Everything they had learned was good. Everything they had learned was right. It was proper and it was true. But there were gaps in their understanding.

In fact, gaping holes in who they believed and understood Jesus Christ to be and all that he had done. They were in the same vulnerable position as any new or young or untaught Christian.

And that position is the danger of a half-learned Christ. The danger of a half-learned Christ. Yes, they were genuine Christian believers.

They understood something of the Lord Jesus Christ identity and his work. But they didn't understand the full truth or the implications of coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

[5 : 17] If you read through Paul's letters, you will see that this is the real problem in all of the churches. The danger of a half-learned Christ. For when you have a half-learned Christ, then you can be gullible.

Open to all sorts of teaching that sounds right. It sounds right, but it is wrong. And it's absolutely sinister. The Colossians faced the very real danger of a half-learned Christ.

And remember the situation at Colossae. There were these false teachers who were telling these new young believers that mere Christianity was not enough. that Jesus Christ was somehow insufficient on his own to give believers fullness.

And that faith in Jesus Christ had to be supplemented. It needed things added to it for a fuller experience and greater liberation to be enjoyed.

These false teachers were not telling the Colossians that what they had was wrong. No. They were telling them what they had was right, but it needed something added to it. It was insufficient.

[6 : 29] They were saying things like, hey, you've made a good start, but you could do better. You have a good foundation, but you need something else. And we can give it to you.

So what the Apostle Paul does in these verses that we have before us this afternoon is to begin to teach the Colossians the full truth about Jesus Christ.

He teaches them about the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. It doesn't get any bigger than Jesus Christ. It doesn't get any better than Jesus Christ.

You can't get better than faith in Jesus Christ. And friends, if we know less about Jesus than what the Apostle Paul gives and teaches here, then we risk in our own spiritual lives the vulnerability and the danger of a half-learned Christ.

So firstly, in verses 15 to 18, Paul teaches Jesus Christ is the supreme Lord of all creation.

[7 : 39] Jesus Christ is the supreme Lord of all creation. Paul, in these verses, in an absolutely exquisite, wonderful way, teaches the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

That there is nothing like Jesus Christ. No one like Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has no equal. Paul here describes Jesus Christ in a way that should lead the Colossians and us not to debate Jesus Christ or discuss Jesus Christ, but should lead us to trust and marvel and worship Jesus Christ. Paul is declaring to us that Jesus Christ is the supreme Lord of all creation. Let's look at how Paul conveys this to us. He does so in three ways.

Firstly, he tells us Jesus Christ is the unique Lord. He is the unique Lord. Four times in these verses, Paul says, He is.

Jesus Christ is. Verse 15, He is the image of the invisible God. He is, verse 17, before all things.

[8 : 53] He is, verse 18, the head of the body, the church. And again in verse 18, He is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead.

And you can see what Paul is saying, that the same Jesus Christ who was born at Bethlehem, walked this earth and died on the cross, is none other than the eternal God.

The eternal God made manifest, made visible in this world. He is the author of creation and the head of the church, which is the new creation.

He is the firstborn from among the dead. He is the resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ has undone the work of Adam, breaking the curse brought by Adam's fall.

Jesus Christ is the guarantee for all who belong to him of the resurrection. Neil Armstrong, who was the first man to step onto the moon, I'm sure you remember the words that he used as he stepped onto the moon.

[9 : 58] He said, one small step for man and one giant leap for mankind. That's what Paul is saying here. When Jesus Christ stepped out of the tomb, it was one small step, but a great leap for mankind, opening the way for a new order of reality for man.

Jesus Christ in himself is God and ruler over all. To say anything less is ridiculous and makes a nonsense out of who Jesus Christ is.

But secondly, Jesus is not just the unique Lord. He is the Lord of all. Six times in as many verses, Paul uses the word all.

All creation. All things. All things were made by him and all things are governed by him. As John puts it in his gospel in chapter 1 verse 3, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

Or as J.B. Phillips puts it in his paraphrase, all creation took place through him and none took place without him. He is the unique Lord but also the Lord of all.

[11 : 15] And it's easy to see here from the language that Paul uses. He is seeking to convey to us that Jesus Christ is not just the unique Lord and the Lord of all but that Jesus Christ is the center of the universe.

Look at all the words that come before the word him. Verse 16, By him all things were created. All things were created through him and for him.

Verse 17, In him all things hold together. Verse 20, Through him to reconcile to himself all things. Can you see how much Paul is saying about Jesus Christ?

By him and through him and for him and in him and through him. Jesus Christ is the rightful center of the whole universe and everything that exists whether visible or invisible all centers around the Lord Jesus Christ.

But people can't stomach this. It's often said that the center of the world is a very crowded place because so many people think that the world, the universe centers around them.

[12 : 35] But Paul says no. Jesus Christ is the one whom the universe exists and Jesus Christ is the one whom the universe centers and it is through Jesus Christ the universe is sustained.

So then the implication is this. Jesus Christ is not an add-on to life. Jesus Christ is life.

He is the offer of life as Peter said when he was preaching in Acts Jesus Christ is God. That is what Paul is saying. He is the maker and the ruler of life.

Without him there would be no purpose. Without him there would be no meaning to life. In fact without him the whole universe would cease to exist. It was Pascal who said Jesus Christ is the center of everything and the object of everything and he who does not know him knows nothing of the order of the world and nothing of himself.

The false teachers at Colossae were saying you come to us we will take you to a higher level. No they won't says Paul for there is no higher level than Jesus Christ.

[13 : 54] It can't get any higher than Jesus Christ. The false teachers were wanting them to add to Jesus Christ. I once heard it said that the only sum in the world where to add is actually to subtract.

That Jesus Christ plus anything is to take away from Jesus Christ. And you know what inevitably happens in these things when you add anything to Jesus Christ?

The thing that you add ends up becoming more important than Jesus Christ. Add to Jesus Christ? Paul says no. How can you add to the Creator?

Jesus Christ is the supreme Lord of creation. What can you add to the Creator? Not only is he the supreme Lord of creation.

He is secondly in verses 19 and 20. Jesus Christ is the sufficient Lord of salvation. Jesus Christ is the sufficient Lord of salvation.

[14 : 57] Jesus Christ is the sole reconciler. Verse 19 Paul writes in Jesus Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Remember it was this issue of fullness that was unsettling the Colossians.

The false teachers were playing down Jesus Christ. They were saying that Jesus wasn't enough or the Colossians didn't have enough. No says Paul fullness is in Jesus Christ.

All of the fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ. That all of God filled all of Jesus Christ. Deity is to be found nowhere else or in no one else.

It's all in Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ said himself to the disciples if you have seen me you have seen the Father. All of God dwell in all of Jesus Christ.

And his sufficiency and salvation is linked to his supremacy. Because he is the God man he alone can reconcile all things to himself.

[16 : 04] Christ alone is the image of the invisible God verse 15. Christ alone rules over and sustains the entire universe verses 15 to 18.

And only through Christ death alone verse 20 can there be peace with God. There is no room for anyone else.

You see friends that's the reason the creator entered his creation. The creator came in order to be the saviour in order to deal with the deep and eternal enmity that exists between God and us.

Verse 21 Natural man is alienated estranged from God hostile in mind doing evil deeds. But our main problem is not our hostility towards God but God's hostility towards us.

It's not that God doesn't love us. He does. But because we have rejected his rule because we have rejected his love God has become angry with us.

[17:17] But in and through Jesus Christ shed blood on the cross he has made peace. Jesus didn't die to change how God felt about us.

No God loved us anyway. No Jesus Christ death on the cross changed God's treatment of us. No longer objects of God's wrath because Jesus Christ has turned God's wrath away from us and absorbed it for us making peace on the blood of his cross.

The sufficiency of Jesus Christ and salvation winning securing peace with God on our behalf on the cross. It's absolutely wonderful, isn't it?

Friends, we need to have this burned into our hearts and minds and lives. For if we don't, we will live with the danger of a half learned Christ.

Oh, I didn't realize Jesus was so sufficient. I thought I needed something else. Jesus Christ has provided everything I need. I knew he was good, but I didn't realize just how good he was.

[18:34] Have you grasped the sufficiency of Jesus Christ alone in salvation? Friends, Jesus hasn't given us a starter for ten in order that we can get going and finish the job off with rituals and ceremonies or experiences.

No. Jesus Christ has provided full salvation. He is the sufficient Lord of salvation. He reconciles all things.

Nothing or nobody lies outside of his work. But this isn't universalism. No, it's not the teaching of universalism that everyone in the end will be saved.

No, not everyone will be saved. The Lord Jesus Christ said so himself. But all that are saved will be saved only by the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no one capable of doing this. He is the sufficient Lord of salvation. Have you put your trust in him?

[19:39] Salvation can be found nowhere else. He is the sufficient Lord of salvation. salvation. The words that the apostle Paul writes here in verse 15 to 20 wouldn't be out of place in a systematic theology book.

But remember, we're not reading them in a systematic theology book. We are reading them in a letter. A letter to a real young church of genuine Christian believers at Colossae who are under the very real threat of being coaxed, enticed away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Which is why Paul writes as he does in verses 21 to 23 that they may be established and firm in their faith. Paul writes encouraging them to remain steadfast and to stick with the gospel.

This is the Jesus Christ you have received supreme in creation and sufficient in salvation. So don't be moved from him. Continue in the faith.

Be stable and steadfast. Don't shift from the hope of the gospel that you heard which has been proclaimed in all creation. You were once God's enemies but God reconciled you to himself through Christ's death.

[21:00] And one day our salvation will be complete when we will be presented holy and blameless and above reproach before him. But there is a warning.

We will only be presented holy, blameless and above reproach if we continue in the faith. The faith once delivered to all the saints.

That is why Paul is writing. He doesn't want them to be taken in and eternally shipwrecked by the false teachers. Paul writes that they would realize and understand the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

That he is all and that he has accomplished all that is necessary for salvation. Jesus Christ has done everything already. If you have him, you have it all.

You need no more. You have his spirit. So don't listen to the voices that tell you you need something more or something else needs to be done.

[22:07] Jesus Christ is all you need. Jesus Christ is supreme and sufficient in all his ways. He has no equal.

He rules and reigns over the entire universe. And he is sufficient to present you holy and blameless before God the Father.

So continue in him. Don't be moved ever. Be stable and steadfast in him. Let us pray.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving.

Father, we ask that you would help us to see you more clearly, that we would love you more dearly, and that we would follow you more nearly, day by day.

[23 : 22] Fill us with a sense of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and fill us with all the riches that are ours in him. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Amen.