

Colossians 1:15-20

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

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

Image of the invisible God *Colossians 1:15-20*

These 6 verses in Paul's letter to the Colossian church are one of the most stunning passages in the whole Bible. Dick Lucas in his commentary gives them a whole chapter. They really convey just how radically different the Jesus movement is to any other religious group on the planet, because Jesus was like no other person who has ever lived or will ever live. I use the word religious as a kind of generic term because whatever Jesus did do he didn't found a religion. At least not in the sense most people understand religion. Jesus was dangerous when he was alive, more so when he was dead, and even more so when he rose from the dead. The religious leaders of the time detested him because he spoke truth to power and revealed their hypocrisy. But also because he claimed, in effect, to be God. Not in so many words – He did not say "I am God", but he did say, for instance, "Before Abraham was, I am". This was a red rag to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law because they knew that 'I am' was the name of God, so they decided to kill him for his heresy. His resurrection was the proof that his claims were true.

Dick Lucas suggests that the believers at Colossae were young in the faith and susceptible to false teaching from within the church, and so the reason Colossians was written was to make the church aware just who Jesus was and how radically different He was to anything else on offer.

What might have happened was that Jesus' teaching would become assimilated within the fashionable Jewish and pagan practices of the time, and the astonishing fact that God had become a man would be lost. But Paul knew this would be disastrous for the church. And so he wades in very early in his letter with these truths about the Jesus which are still able to disturb people today, for reasons I will come back to. So what does Paul say?

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

This is an extraordinary opening statement. God is not measurable or visible or provable, we all know that. Creation is an amazing thing to observe and try and understand. We're getting there with the help of many who don't even believe in God. But Paul is about to say that Jesus is instrumental in two things.

1. Showing us what God is like. He is the image of God. Image is very important to us, as we know, in the age of TV and populist politics. If we want to know what God is like, Jesus shows us. If we look at how he lived his life we will see God.

2. He's the firstborn over all creation. *16 In Him all things were created...all things have been created through him and for him.*

This is hard to comprehend. It contradicts any suggestion that Jesus only came into existence in Bethlehem as a baby in the early first century. It's only with the eyes of faith that we can see the significance of this.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is not God's last minute rescue package, he was always in the plan. He is *before* ALL things. And *in Him*, ALL things hold together.

There are 7 uses of the word ALL in the six verses, because Paul is describing what theologians call **the supremacy of Christ**. He is Lord of all of heaven and the universe. And by all Paul does not mean just Christians or just anyone who believes there is a God of some description. Jesus, the rabbi from Nazareth, is Lord of everything. This speaks to all people, you cannot get around it, you must either accept or deny it.

The fact that verse 18 says he is head of the church barely needs saying, but then Paul moves on to what's known as the **sufficiency of Jesus**. Dick Lucas here says that what this means is that '*no other spiritual power whatsoever is necessary to bring to [all people] God's full and final salvation*'. And this puts paid to any Christians or other false teachers who feel the need to add other things in. Jesus is all we need. If anyone tells you that you are lacking certain other things without which you are incomplete as a Christian, the answer is that Jesus has done all that is necessary and all your trust must be in Him.

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

There are many heresies and cults, like JW's and Mormons, and many others *within* the church, who extend the requirements sometimes unconsciously. They add unnecessary burdens. But Jesus came to set us free, not to add to our stress.

Notice the word 'peace' in the last verse - *to reconcile all things to Himself by making peace through Jesus blood*. If your faith does not bring you peace, it's not Jesus you are putting your faith in. So what does what the world calls 'religion' tell us? It tells us that there are many different ways to God, many different systems of belief, many different spiritualities, and that you can pick and choose what suits you. This is a product of a consumer mentality and it's like catnip to seekers after spiritual truth, because it takes no account of what is actually true about God, only of what sounds interesting or even worse seems fashionable. But is it true?

There can logically only be one God, or He wouldn't be all knowing and all powerful and all loving. In very ancient times it was believed that there were many gods - what was different about Jewish culture was monotheism, the idea of the One True God. But even now our perceptions are massively different depending on the culture we grew up in.

Jesus as I have said was dangerous because He turned upside down even the Jewish belief system by claiming, as a human being, equality with the one true God. And his teaching is just as dangerous today.

If you say Jesus is the only answer, and quote Jesus words "no one comes to the Father but by me" it has no let out clause. In a modern religious context this is offensive. What right do we have to say He is the only way?

But if we are with Paul in this, that *all things have been created through Him and for Him*, I think we have to trust that He therefore knows the hearts of all people, whatever they believe, or don't believe. It's out of our hands. We can't judge people. As followers of Jesus we just have to love them.

When we think about how we should live, and what is right or wrong, what we should believe, Jesus doesn't say, believe this and this and this, do this and this, he doesn't give us a strict template for how to live.

He just says "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35)

"I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) "I am the gate for the sheep." (John 10:7,9) "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25) "I am the good shepherd." (John 10:11, 14). "I am the true vine." So when we ask what direction our lives should take, He just says "I am the way". When we ask how do we know what is true? He says "I am the truth". And when we ask how should we live? He says "I am the life".

The good news is that Jesus is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, and we don't need to look any further than Him. Amen.