

Colossians 1:15-28

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. 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. 24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Luke 10:38-42

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' 41 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'

The image of the invisible God

Colossians 1:15-28

It's always useful to remind yourself when and why any particular New Testament letter was written. This one was almost certainly written *before* any of the gospels. Paul in the next chapter of Colossians to the passage we heard says this, in following up his statements about Jesus: 2:4 *I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments....* 2: 8 *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.* He's warning them about the threat of false teaching within the church. And he's passionate about Jesus v17 *Jesus is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* Dick Lucas in his commentary points out that *the danger comes from... teaching that is largely...Christian but which has been influenced more than it knows by the spirit of the age*' I actually discussed some of this letter with a Christadelphian I knew at college who believed that Jesus was not God incarnate but a created being, on a secondary level to the Father. Possibly an example of the people Paul is addressing here. Are we tempted to think that this is the case, that God in actual human form is impossible? If we broach the subject many people will tell us that it's a fairy story. Although it has to be said that there are a lot of people who hold more extraordinary beliefs with much less evidence.

The question is how believable we find Jesus, or Paul, to be. There are things you can detect about the teaching at the church at Colossae from what Paul says in his counterarguments. For instance there's a reference to the 'worship of angels'. Why would anyone need to worship angels? There are usually things within false teaching or cults which are felt to be necessary if you want to really be what *they* call proper christians. Of course this explains why we have many christian denominations which all tend to feel that *only they* have the correct beliefs. From which Anglicans are not necessarily immune. This is why I would never describe myself as an Anglican, or a Baptist, despite being brought up in a Baptist church. I quite like now to say I'm a follower of the Way, as it might attract questions, whereas 'I'm a christian' is just met with indifference.

Anyway Paul's concern about problems he was seeing at Colossae produced the wonderful passage we heard from the beginning of Colossians. *The Son (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God.* We often struggle to understand what God is like because he is beyond the scope of our imagination. But we do often forget the thing that Paul points out, that the solution to this is to pay close attention to Jesus. How he lived, how he spoke, how he treated the people around him. Image is something we're all aware of, living in a modern culture which is so dependent on TV and especially the media for our understanding of not just our beliefs but of our whole world. view

With the political story of the moment being a new Prime Minister we're constantly assessing the people who wish to be our leader. Are they trustworthy? Do they have integrity? It's the central issue of the day. God's nature may be mysterious and seem so distant from us. But an actual human being was and is God. Paul is drawing the church back to the central belief of our faith. God is not distant, He is one of us.

But he doesn't leave it there. He goes on to talk about what we have been given as a result of this. What we need, but also what we do not need. As I have said we can often be tempted by new ideas and new teachings and Colossae as a new church was probably open to all sorts of new ideas.

Paul makes three crucial points here (Lucas)

1. The supremacy and the sufficiency of Christ

In everything Jesus has supremacy (v18). In other words, Jesus is Lord and he has done everything necessary for our salvation. You cannot have the one without the other. If he is *before all things*, and if *all things hold together in him (17)* it's reasonable to accept there is no one else we need. Fullness of life can be and is found in Him alone. He is sufficient. There are no spiritual add ons necessary. You can spot a cult by looking for the add ons.

2. Christ as the Creator and the Redeemer

In Him all things were created. (v16) So we owe Him our physical existence as well as our spiritual life.

And there is no division between religious life and the rest of

life. This is a false teaching called dualism which emphasises the spiritual as more important than the physical. It holds that God's presence is found in the spiritual and religious life, and not normal daily life, work and play. So the division of secular and sacred is a false concept. As an example, amongst some Christians, working for your living is seen as inferior to living by faith. This is a lie. We're redeemed or made new in Christ as integrated people, flesh and spirit together. Every aspect of life is sacred.

3. Christ is before time, on earth, and over all

The word *all* appears seven times in the first six verses of our passage. Paul is telling us in no uncertain terms who Jesus is. Before all, in all, over all. All that God has done has been in and through Christ. As believers, Christ lives in us, and so we're the beneficiaries of everything God has done in Him.

There are often new movements within the church which seem successful and attract large numbers. But the real test is whether we grow in love for each other and whether we always hold Jesus at the very centre of our faith. Whether there is fruit from what we do and who we are, and the test of that is found in Galatians 5.22-23 *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* The Spirit mentioned is the Spirit of Jesus. As Paul says, *God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus.*

We must not forget, He dwells in us, and He is all we need. Amen.