

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: Our intern, Anna Billson, told me about the time she was working with some international students in Manchester, England, with whom she wanted to share the gospel. She said, “I met with a woman from China who’d been in the country about two weeks. I asked if she’d ever heard about Jesus and she said, ‘I’ve heard about Jesus a lot since I’ve come into the country. Everyone keeps saying, “Jesus Christ!”’ It was shocking how prevalently Jesus’ name is used in my country where so few call upon Jesus as Lord. It was sad to see that this was the impression she had of Jesus from coming into my country. There is so much gospel work to be done to teach her and my country who the true Jesus is.”
- B. Both unbelievers and Christians are guilty of a far greater sin than we realize when we devalue the name of Christ. The third of the Ten Commandments says, “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*” That applies to the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This command came to my mind as I read this week’s text. Turn to **Col. 1.**
- C. Last Sunday we ended on the familiar truth of the gospel in vv.13-14: “*For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” Our Bibles show a period and a new paragraph there but actually Paul just keeps going, “*who is the image of the invisible God.*” The gospel is a wonderful and familiar truth to all believers in Jesus Christ but often we are not so aware of just how wonderful Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is. That is one reason we’re often unfazed when we hear or use his name as a mindless exclamation or worse, a curse.

D. I've told you that as I approached my final sermons the Holy Spirit reminded me, *Preach Christ!* And there is no more vivid description of Christ in all the Bible than what we find in **Col. 1**. Turn there. **Our goal today is to take Christ from the shadowy corners of our minds and gaze upon his glory till we are filled with joyful thanksgiving to God.** Listen again to **vv.15-17...**

I. JESUS CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD, GOD MADE HUMAN (1:15)

A. Paul's first order of business is to establish that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He does this because teachers in Colossae were infecting the church with diabolical "mysteries" that diminished the deity of Christ. We need it because the world around us, who use Jesus' name so freely, dulls our sense of his supremacy over all things. So he begins, "The Son is the image of the invisible God."

B. No one can see God and live. 1 Tim 6:16 says that God *"lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see."* Yet central to Christian teaching is this statement: "The Son is the image of the invisible God." John wrote, *"No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."* (Jn 1:18). Heb. 1:3 says, *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."*

The Greek word translated *image* is literally *icon*. We've all seen a kind of 'icon' of the invisible God-- Michelangelo's God painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel—fierce eyes, flowing hair and beard, arm reaching out to give life to the languid Adam. But that is a woefully inadequate icon, a mere rubber-stamp image

God chose Jesus as his own living, breathing, human image; his icon, but not because of his physical appearance.

Jesus is God's image because he embodies all that God is. V.19 says, "*God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.*"

Illus.: My friend, Matt Woodley, tells about a visit he had with a woman named Jill who is not a Christian. She started talking about all kinds of bad things Christians have done. Eventually Matt interrupted her and said, "Jill, I think we're missing the point. I mean, you are absolutely right about the horrible things that have been done in the name of Christ. I can't condone or justify any of that. But for me when I define my faith in Christ, it doesn't come down to political issues. If I want to know what God is like, I look at the face of Jesus, because that is the face of God." So I asked Jill, "**What do you see when you look at Jesus?**"

II. JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF CREATION (1:15-17)

- A. "*The firstborn over all creation*" (v.15b). The word, 'firstborn,' is confusing to us. We naturally take 'firstborn' to mean 'born first.' It seems to imply to us that Jesus came into being by being born; suggesting that he did not always exist. But that is not what the word means. It points to the *rights* of the firstborn, the pre-eminence of the firstborn, not the *born* part of the firstborn. *Illus.:* Someone without children might say, "I've appointed Charles as my heir," even tho' Charles wasn't born to him. Perhaps the most striking use in the Bible is in **Ps. 89:27**: God is speaking of the Messiah he will send, and says, "*I will **appoint** him my **firstborn**, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.*" Christ is the firstborn both by the Father's appointment, and by right as the Creator, but not by birth. As God, he was never 'born.' And as man, his birth in Bethlehem came long after he was appointed firstborn.

B. What follows is a list of five qualifications that give Jesus Christ the right to ownership and lordship of creation.

1. “For in him all things were created...”. **Everything in creation came out of Christ’s mind and being.** The blueprints and beauty of all creation came from *within Christ*. **Everything that is made took form in him and issued into being by his power acting on his idea.**

People don’t generally think of Jesus as a genius. We think of him as holy, good, wonderful, wise, but, as **Dallas Willard** has written, “*Not one in a thousand will spontaneously think of him in conjunction with such words as well-informed, brilliant, or smart.*” (*The Divine Conspiracy*, p.134). But Christ’s IQ is immeasurable; off the charts! The genius of Jesus is on display in creation. Our brightest minds in science are merely lifting the fringe of Christ’s intellect when they map genes or explore the stars or do theoretical mathematics.

Paul stretches our thinking here to be sure we understand the magnitude, the range, of what was created in Christ: “*things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.*” There is far more to Christ’s creation than meets the eye; far more than we can begin to imagine. Paul particularly wants to drive home the invisible creations of Christ because there were teachers in that day—as there are today—who taught that elite spirituality meant mystically connecting with the unseen spiritual beings like angels. So he pointedly says that Jesus created not only all that we see but also the vast, invisible hierarchical orders of the unseen world. **As Lord of Creation all things were created in him.**

2. “All things were created **through him**”. This means that every created thing, visible or invisible, miniature and mighty, alive or inanimate, was not only conceived of by God’s Son but were brought into being **through** his will and his life. He energizes and enlivens and unifies all creation. **So he is Lord of creation because *through him* all things were created.** But more...
3. “All things were created...**for him**”. **For him**. Jesus Christ created for **his own good pleasure**. His vast creation, seen and unseen, is his own art gallery, his own laboratory, his own recital hall, his own kingdom. Do you delight in a sunset or mountains? Christ delights more! Do you delight at a wedding? Christ delights more! Do you delight in a baby? Christ delights more! The sunset, home, the baby—they’re all created, first and foremost, *for him!*

What’s more, he created not only for his good pleasure, but also to reveal himself to mankind and the spiritual beings, as all artists do. He created so that the he could be known. His creation is an evangelist! Listen to **Rom 1:20**, *“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”*

Listen to this intriguing statement by the great preacher, **G. Campbell Morgan**. [When Jesus says,] *“I am the true Vine,” we make a mistake if we say that Jesus borrowed the figure of the vine to teach us what He is. The deeper truth is this. God planted the vine in the world and let it grow through the centuries on the pattern of the infinite Christ.*”ⁱ

So he is Lord of creation because all things were created for him.

4. “He is before all things”. The Son of God is eternal, without beginning or end. Christ is the Uncaused Cause. When there was no earth or sky, dark nor light, no man nor angel, Christ was there, one with the Father and Spirit. He is the Great Predecessor. **So he is Lord of creation because he is before all things.**
5. “And in him all things hold together”. *Illus.*: Casey told me that he and Danielle chose this verse for their marriage: *“In him all things—including their marriage—holds together.* Theologically, there are two implications. First, Christ consciously and by his own will keeps all the universe running. At this very moment, galaxies and planets and atoms all maintain their orbits and shape because our great Christ *wills* them to. He supplies the unseen cement and energy and order of all that exists. He is the absolute center of the visible and invisible ecosystems. **There is no Mother Nature! There is only Christ! Bishop Moule** put it, *“He keeps the cosmos from becoming a chaos.”*

But more: he is also the Reason. Nothing adds up without Christ. David Garland wrote what I was trying to say: *“Christ is more than the force that preserves the orderly arrangement of the cosmos; he is its rationale, its rhyme and reason. ... He is the basic operating principle controlling existence”* (p.90).

Illus.: At the Fermilab supercollider in the western suburbs scientists are looking for the ever-elusive Higgs boson, also known as “the God particle.” The article I read said, “Physicists believe that this special subatomic particle allows all of the other particles in the universe

to have mass and come together to form, well, basically everything that is around us.”

While it's certainly possible that God built such a tiny particle into the deepest part of his creation, it isn't the God particle. The God particle that holds all things together—actually, the God person—is Jesus Christ. Consider what Paul writes in Ephesians 1:10: “[*Christ*] bring[*s*] unity to all things in heaven and on earth.”

As Garland points it, “*Christ is the theological ‘theory of everything.’ But he is not a set of physics laws; he is a person, who has shown his love for us by giving his life. The principle uniting the universe has ‘a heart, a purpose and a face’*” (p.106). **So he is Lord of creation because *in him* all things hold together.**

We’ve seen how Christ is Lord of creation. But there’s more...

III. JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF THE CHURCH (1:18-23)

When compared to the glories of creation, what’s so great about being Lord of the church? If you know much about churches, it seems like more of a footnote to greatness than its epitome. Ah, but that is not how God sees Christ’s glory.

A. **V.18** begins, “*And he is the head of the body, the church.*”

The very image that Jesus’ body is the church tells us there is definitely more to the church than meets the eye! But that’s not the half of it. Do you remember Ezekiel’s vision of God’s people like a field of dry bones which God brings back to life? It is a picture that fits us too. Like Israel, all of us were dead as doornails. A wilderness population of skeletons. Christ has brought us together, *knit* us together, made us muscle and sinew and arteries to one another, and he is our Head, giving us one mind and purpose, “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.*”

B. V.18 continues, “he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have supremacy.” Jesus is the *beginning* of the church **because** he is the *firstborn from among the dead*. In fact, the church took her first breath in a tomb when Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus was the first member of the church.

There’s that word, *firstborn*, again. Now, in this case it is certainly true that he is the first human being ever born again from the grave. Others had been resurrected back to mortal life but **Jesus was the first human being to be resurrected to immortal, eternal life.** But the main meaning of *firstborn* here is that Jesus Christ is also the preeminent heir—the eldest Son—over a new race of human beings. Not the mortals but the *immortals*, and Jesus is our Elder Brother. He is God’s pre-eminent heir and we are his joint-heirs.

There is a race of people who have risen up from among the dead, and the world knows little of them. They picture post-death people as hollow-eyed ghouls or zombies spreading fear and death. Ah, but there is a race birthed from the womb of the tomb, and a maternity ward of the re-created, of the born *again*, a race more alive than the mere mortals around them. They do not wear the rotting rags of death but robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. Their eyes are not gray hollows but bright with immortality. They have celestial songs on their lips and call heaven their home. And they—we—all swear loving allegiance to their Lord, the Firstborn from among the dead, our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ.

“So that in everything he might have the supremacy”. Christ’s astonishing supremacy over creation pales in comparison to his being head of the church. The Son of

God created all the seen and unseen universe *ex nihilo*, but he created his body, the church from *less* than nothing. He created us from the dead. The glorious Christ in Rev. 1 says triumphantly, “*I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*”

When the Son of God created the universe it was a kind of celebration. He could simply speak everything into being, conceived by his artistic and loving genius. When he did the *morning stars*—the hosts of heaven—sang for joy. But when he began the church the Son of God humbled himself, taking the very nature of a servant, and dying on the cross for sinners. The Son of God brought forth the church, his body, not out of nothing, but from the womb of his own tomb. And now his body, the church, not only *represents* him in the world, we *are* his hands and feet to the people around us.

“For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

And *that* is why we exalt the name of Jesus Christ, and never misuse it! That is why we worship him together. That is why we give him our lives and love him with all our hearts.

ⁱ In W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*, p.34