

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Liar, Lunatic Or Lord?”

Colossians 1:15-23

2004

Introduction

In every religion outside of biblical Christianity, you will find either:

1. A rejection of what the Bible teaches about Christ (his deity or humanity)
2. An effort to add something to the work of Christ

In the case of the Colossian church, the false teachers were doing both – subtracting from His person and adding to His work.

But Christian apologist Josh McDowell says, in light of the biblical claims, there are only three possible conclusions as to the identity of Jesus Christ:

“Either Jesus Christ was a liar, or He was a lunatic, or He was just who He claimed to be: The Lord God.”

C.S. Lewis, who was once an agnostic, wrote this:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher: He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says that he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher: He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Paul’s solution to the Colossian Heresy was to present the supremacy of Christ in relation to God, Creation and the Church.

I The Identity Of Christ

A. He is the **image** of the invisible God [Verse 15a]

Funny story: There was a little boy who was drawing pictures on the floor one day as his mother was working. She said to him, "What are you drawing?" He said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." "But no one knows what God looks like," she said. "They will when I get through!" the boy replied.

Image = Eikon = “Likeness or manifestation”

Invisible = Aoratos = “Not visible or capable of being seen”

John 12:44-45 “Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.”

Rom 9:5 "... Christ, who is God over all ..."

Application: Either Jesus Christ was lying, out of His mind or He was truly God in the flesh. There are no other options.

B. He is the firstborn over all creation [Verse 15b]

Firstborn = Prototokos = "Priority in time or foremost in rank"

In this context, Paul probably has both ideas in mind:

Christ preceded the whole Creation, and He is Sovereign over all Creation.

Contrary to the false teachings by Jehovah's Witnesses and other cults, the title "firstborn" does not mean that Jesus was created or that He is less than God.

Ancient rabbis used **firstborn** as a Messianic title: "God said, As I made Jacob a first-born (Exodus 4:22), so also will I make king Messiah a first-born (Psalm 89:27).

C. He is the **creator** of all things (architect, builder, and goal) [Verse 16]

Creator = Ktizo = "To manufacture or fabricate"

He = Intensive "autos" = "He alone – to the exclusion of all others."

John 1:1-3 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

1 Cor 8:6 "... there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

1. Things in heaven and on **earth**

2. Things visible and **invisible** – including:

Visible = Horatos = "What can be seen"

Invisible = Aoratos = "What cannot be seen"

a. Thrones, powers, rulers, authorities

Thrones = Thronos = "Seat of authority"

Powers = Kuriotes = "Rulers, governments"

Rulers = Arche = "Chief (in order, time, place, or rank)"

Authorities = Exousia = "Authority or jurisdiction"

These are references to the invisible world of angels, both good and evil. With the Colossian heresy in mind, which effectively placed angels as mediators between God and man, Paul highlights that even the cosmic powers and principalities, were created by Christ and will ultimately answer to Him.

Eph 1:20-21 "... Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and

authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

Application:

Today, as in the days of the Colossian church, there is a certain fascination with angelic beings, astral teachers, and ascended masters.

Col 2:18-19 “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.”

3. All things have been created by Him and for Him

He = Intensive “autos” = “He alone – to the exclusion of all others.”

Rom 11:36 “For from him and through him and to him are all things.”

Our Lord is not only the builder of the universe; He is also its architect and owner. All things have been created *in Him* (the eternal plans for the creation abode in Him), *by Him* (He acted as builder) and *for Him* (the creation belongs to Him and is to reflect His glory).

Application: Including you!!

D. He is before all things [Verse 17]

He = Intensive “autos” = “He alone – to the exclusion of all others.”

Paul does not say, “he came to be (ginomai) before all things,” but that “he is” before all things.”

+John 8:58 “... before Abraham came into existence, I am!”

1. In Him all things hold together

He = Intensive “autos” = “He alone – to the exclusion of all others.”

Hold together = Sunistao = “Continue, endure, exist”

Heb 1:3 “... sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

Application:

Christ is not only the one who brought all things into being, but He continues His work by holding everything together.

The rotation of the planets, the delicate balance of our earth’s atmosphere, the incredible complexity of the human body all owe themselves to the sustaining work of Jesus Christ.

And if He can handle the universe, He can handle your problems!

E. He is the head of the body, the church [Verse 18a]

He = Intensive “autos” = “He alone – to the exclusion of all others.”

Head = Kephale = “Authority, supremacy, director”

Church = Ekklesia = Compound word meaning “The called out ones”

Eph 1:22-23 “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Eph 5:23 “Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.”

Application:

In Colossians 2:19 Paul says that those who seek encounters with angels (good or evil) “have lost connection to the head.” Not a very attract word picture! Have you ever seen a chicken with its head cut off?

How do we stay connected? Through the Word!

F. He is the beginning and the **firstborn** from among the dead [Verse 18b]

Beginning = Arche = “Chief in rank”

Rev 1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Firstborn = Prototokos = “Priority in time or foremost in rank”

Christ is the origin and source of the life of the church, the pioneer of resurrection and eternal life. He alone – to the exclusion of all others is the one who knows the way from death to life.

Rev 1:5 “Jesus Christ ... [is] the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

1. So that in everything He might have the **supremacy**

“He” is again the intensive autos “He alone – to the exclusion of all others”

Supremacy = Proteuo = “To have the preeminence”

By virtue of Who He is (the Sovereign Lord, Creator, Sustainer, and Head of the Church), and by virtue of What He accomplished through the resurrection, God’s overall purpose is that Jesus Christ alone might have preeminence and be Lord of all.

Application:

Like the Colossian Heresy, many people today reject Christ as the only way, and assert He is only one of many ways to God, or just a part of the way to God. But the Bible emphatically states that Jesus Christ is the only way, and the one and only name by which anyone can be saved (Acts 4:12).

But of all the teachers, gurus, or religious leaders, only Jesus Christ claimed to be both God and man. This explains the name which the shepherds whispered when they came into the stable after the angels' announcement. They knelt in awe before the Babe lying there and breathed the one word, “Immanuel” -- “**God with us.**”

II The Plan Of The Father

A. God’s pleasure was: [Verse 19-20a]

Pleased = Eudokeo = “To think well of or approve”

1. To have all His **fullness** dwell in Christ

Fullness = Pleroma = “To be filled full”

Dwell = Katoikeo = “To house permanently”

“Fullness” refers to “the fullness of deity,” that in Christ, the incarnate Son, was the very fullness of God, all the qualities of God’s divine essence.

What is Paul saying? That Jesus Christ is nothing less than God!

Col 2:9 “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form ...”

2. To **reconcile** to Himself all things

- a. Whether things on earth or things in heaven

Reconcile = Apokatallasso = “To change from enmity to friendship”

Contrary to the teachings of the false teachers, Paul emphatically states that Jesus Christ alone is the means of reconciliation with God.

Note: God reconciled man “to Himself.” Man can add nothing to it or detract from it. He simply has the choice to either accept or reject God’s offer of reconciliation through the death of Christ on the cross.

2 Cor 5:18-19 “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ ... not counting men's sins against them.”

- B. God’s **strategy** for reconciliation: [Verse 20b]

1. He made **peace** through Christ’s blood

- a. Which Jesus shed on the cross

Rom 5:1 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...”

III The Identity Of Mankind

- A. They were **alienated** from God [Verse 21a]

Alienated = Apallotrioo = “To estrange away, or be a non-participant”

Before salvation all men stand in opposition to God in one way or another.

- B. They were **enemies** in their minds: [Verse 21b]

Enemies = Echthros = “To be hateful (passively) or actively hostile”

Rom 8:7 “... the sinful mind is hostile to God.”

1. Because of their evil behavior

Evil behavior isn’t the cause of our alienation from God – it is the effect of our alienation from God as a result of our sin nature.

Titus 1:16 “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”

IV The Power Of The Gospel

A. The divine nature of the gospel

1. But now God had **reconciled** them: [Verse 22a]

a. By Christ's physical body through death

The Colossian Heresy was teaching that Jesus was not really fully man. But Paul refutes this by emphasizing that Christ's physical life, death and resurrection has saved us!

Eph 2:12-13 "... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. **But now** in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the **blood** of Christ."

2. But now God had presented them: [Verse 22b]

a. **Holy** in his sight

Holy = Hagios = "Set apart" or "Physically pure, morally blameless"

The goal of redemption isn't just to "keep us out of Hell", but to set us apart to God from Satan's world system and to enable us to live physically pure and morally blameless lives.

Eph 1:4 "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

There are three aspects of holiness or sanctification in the New Testament:

1. Positional: We have been made holy - Heb 10:10
2. Progressive: We are to make every effort to be holy - 2 Peter 3:14
3. Complete: We will be made holy - 1 Thess 5:23-24

b. Without blemish

A veiled reference to the priestly duty of inspecting potential temple sacrifices. We are to offer ourselves as sacrifices to God.

Rom 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship."

c. **Free** from accusation

Anegkletos = "Unaccused, irreproachable, blameless"

We are declared innocent and all charges against us are dropped!

Rom 8:33-34 "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

B. The conditional nature of the gospel

1. *If* you **continue** in your faith: [Verse 23a]

Is Paul suggesting that we can only be saved if we work really, really hard?
We can say with confidence that this is NOT what he is saying.

F.F. Bruce: “If the gospel teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it teaches at the same time that the saints are those who finally persevere - in Christ. Continuance is the test of reality.”

Application:

In other words, if you are truly saved, God’s power and grace will enable you to continue in your faith. But I do not believe that God will override your freewill choice to rebel against Him. Therefore, we must cooperate in His plan for our ultimate deliverance and glory.

1 Cor 15:1-2 “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”

a. Established and firm

Established = Themelioo = “To be grounded or settled”

Firm = Hedraios = “To be immovable”

The perfect tense of the verb stresses the continuing state of solidarity and the passive voice looks at this as a work that God accomplishes in believers when they hold fast to the person and work of Christ.

2. *If* you **remain** unmoved from: [Verse 23b]

Unmoved = Metakineo = “Not shifting”

a. The hope held out in the gospel

Col 2:6-7 “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

C. The universal nature of the gospel [Verse 23c]

1. It was **heard** by the Colossians

2. It was **proclaimed** to every creature under heaven

How could Paul make such a statement when the gospel had not yet been preached to every far-flung corner of the earth?

He gives us the answer in Romans 10:18:

Rom 10:18 “But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”

Ps 19:1-4 “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they

display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”

D. The privileged nature of the gospel [Verse 23d]

1. Paul was a **servant** of the gospel

Servant = Diakonos = “An attendant doing menial service”

Eph 3:7-8 “I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ...”

Application: Who or what do you serve?

The answer lies in how you spend you time, what you think about, how you spend your money, what you give priority to in your life.

Conclusion

So, who is Jesus Christ to you? Liar, Lunatic or Lord?

If He is the Lord of your life, you owe Him your allegiance, your service, your praise -- your very life!

May God give us hearts to freely, joyfully and gratefully give Him His due!

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