

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING

How important do most people today think Jesus is?
Are we ever tempted to underestimate Jesus? In what ways?

Let's read this passage together and be amazed by the Jesus we read about!

QUESTIONS

Write a list of all Christ's qualities. Maybe put some in your own words.
What overall point is Paul making about Jesus?

What does it mean that Christ is "the image of the invisible God"?
How would you answer someone if they said that Jesus being "the firstborn of all creation" means He is a created being?
So what *does* it mean to be the firstborn?

Why is Jesus the firstborn of all creation? What gives Him that right? ("For...")
What exactly did Jesus create? Where? What? Who? (16)
Think about some of the consequences of the fact that everything wasn't just made *by* Jesus but also *for* Jesus.
How is 17 a summary of what we've just seen?

In 18, Paul slightly changes the subject. What is he now discussing?
What is Jesus' relationship to the church?
How would that be encouraging for those first few believers?
How is it encouraging for us as a church gathering here?

What does it mean that Jesus is "the firstborn from the dead"?
In what way is He (especially in terms of His resurrection) "the beginning"?
The beginning of what?
Does this change how we think about the church now?

What do we learn about His relationship to God in 19?
"Reconciled" and "making peace" imply there's a problem. What is it?
How does Jesus fix that problem?
In what sense are "all things" reconciled to God through the cross?

CONCLUSION / APPLICATION

Summarise Christ's relationship to God. To creation. To us as a church.

Why do you think Paul bothered to write such a vivid description of Jesus?
What effect does it have on *you*?

If false teachers came in offering deeper knowledge and experience of God through their rules and religious stuff, how might we answer them from here?
How does this deal with the ways we underestimate Jesus? (see 'launching')
Answer the non-Christian who asks, "What's so great about Jesus anyway?"
How does a big view of Jesus like this impact our view of mission?

What has especially struck you about Jesus from this passage?
What difference will it make in the next few days?

Spend some time turning these things into prayers of praise to Jesus.

Colossians 1:15-20



Colossians at a glance

The church in Colossae was planted by someone called Epaphras, who Paul says was a "beloved fellow servant... [and] a faithful minister of Christ" (1:7). Paul heard about this new church and was so pleased with how they were growing. But he also wanted to warn them...

There would be people who might try to take them captive, pulling them away from Jesus with clever arguments and ideas (2:8). These people would make them feel they were missing out on everything God had to offer. This might be through promoting special religious activities, judging anyone who didn't join in (2:16). It might be through making them feel inadequate if they weren't enjoying the same super-spiritual experiences as them (2:18). It might be by enforcing a set of rules about things to avoid (2:20-21).

Paul wrote this letter to remind those Christians of what they had – everything! All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, and Jesus dwells fully in believers (2:9-10). It doesn't get fuller than that! All we need is Jesus for knowing God, being saved, growing in godliness, and arriving safely in glory.

We still face the same kinds of influences today, tempting us to add to all Jesus is for us, leaving us feeling less than the genuine article. These studies in Colossians aim to amaze us with the Jesus we first received through the gospel, not shifting from there, and strengthening us to go on walking in Him (2:6-7).

Theme Sentence for 1:15-20

Jesus is supreme and sufficient in creation and in the new creation, the church.

How this passage fits in

This passage lays out who Jesus is in all His glory, lest we be tempted to underestimate Him. He is supreme over everything. As creator, He is head over all things. As redeemer, He is head over the church, which is the start of the new creation, kicked off by His own resurrection. His death has made peace where once was hostility. He reveals God to us. He holds the universe together... the list goes on! If we truly believed Jesus is as described in this short paragraph, we would never be tempted to look elsewhere!

Application

- Grow in our knowledge of Jesus and be amazed by Him
- Be strengthened to continue with Jesus alone

A Passion For Life

Don't forget that next term is *A Passion For Life*. Now is the time to prepare people for that, so please make a special effort to talk about the mission each week and show how each passage spurs us on to share the gospel.

[NB]

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Commentary

This passage is incredibly rich, with layer upon layer of superlatives about the Lord Jesus, especially when you take into account that it's actually all one long sentence in the original. In fact, it's the second half of one *really* long sentence, which began in 1:9!

Paul is continuing his explanation of what he prays for the Colossian Christians. This prayer is about them growing in knowledge of God and growing in godliness as they live for God. The prayer goes on to ask that they be "strengthened... for all endurance... giving thanks to the Father" (11-12). So they should keep going, and do so thankfully.

Why should they be thankful? Because God the Father "has qualified [them] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" and "delivered [them] from the domain of darkness and transferred [them] into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (12-13)

What follows in this passage, therefore, is a description of Jesus, this beloved Son of the Father, the one who has redeemed and forgiven them, and in whose kingdom they now belong.

15 Paul starts this description of Jesus with a startling claim. Jesus is "the image of the invisible God". Jesus doesn't just tell us about God, He reveals the otherwise unknowable God to us. Kings had images; pictures of themselves as a symbol of their power. Idols were images; representations of made-up gods. The Old Testament commands against making images of the one true God are there partly so we don't belittle God in our paltry attempts to draw Him, but also partly because God already *has* an image! The Son is His perfect image, fully broadcasting to the world an accurate depiction of God.

People were also designed to bear God's image, reflecting His nature. Calling Jesus "the image of God" isn't just a comment on His deity, but also that He is the ultimate human, everything humanity failed to be.

The phrase "firstborn of all creation" seems a little troubling at first. Many heretics, such as Jehovah's Witnesses today, claim it means Jesus was the first thing to be created. A quick look at the next verse shows Jesus is the Creator of all things, so that doesn't work!

To be the firstborn is about status, e.g. the promise to the Davidic king in Psalm 89:27. The firstborn is set to gain the inheritance and is especially precious to the Father. Israel is referred to as God's firstborn in Exodus 4:22. Pharaoh's mistreatment of Israel is the reason God will later kill the Egyptians' firstborn sons. To say that Jesus is "the firstborn of all creation" means He is the most precious and important person there is and the one to whom all creation will one day be given.

16 Why is Jesus this image and the firstborn? "For..." He is the Creator of everything – wherever, whatever, whoever, whether or not we notice it; He made it all. And it wasn't just made *by* Him, it was made *for* Him. This Jesus is God Himself, one with the Father in creation. It is astounding that only 30-or-so years after His state execution, people were making claims like this about the man Jesus of Nazareth!

17 This verse unpacks the implications of what we've just seen. He's the image/firstborn because He made everything. Therefore He is "before all things and in him all things hold together." Not just before all things chronologically (although that's true!), He is before everything in terms of importance. Everything hangs on Him. He sustains the world and is its focal point. What an encouragement for those early Christians putting their faith in this Christ – He's no obscure young upstart but the founder and focus of the entire cosmos.

18 This verse changes the topic slightly; still describing Jesus but turning our attention from His headship over the world as a whole, onto His headship of the church in particular. But in case we think this bit is less impressive, Paul makes clear that the church is the tip of a much bigger iceberg. The attention has turned from creation to the *new* creation, begun in Jesus' resurrection and manifested in the church.

He is the head, the chief, the leader of the church. The word 'church' means 'gathering', so picture that first little house church in Colossae or your Connect Group in a lounge. Jesus is the leader of that gathering.

And it's an enormously significant gathering! Jesus is "the beginning" of the new creation. The "firstborn from the dead" refers to His resurrection and to the fact that Jesus is the first of many; all believers, the *entire* church gathering, will one day rise again like Him. Jesus is the firstborn of this new creation in much the same way as He is the firstborn of the original creation (15). He is preeminent in all things. This is shown in the church now which is the group of people who are the 'early adopters', if you like! Recognising Jesus now!

19 Why is He the head of the church, etc.? "For..." He is God. The idea of "fullness" is likely one which the potential false teachers would have used to talk about the whole package you could expect if you joined their special group (see *Colossians at a glance* on the front page). Here Paul subverts it by pointing to Jesus' fullness. If we have Jesus we have everything of God; no other method or means will give us more.

20 Continuing the explanation of why Jesus is the head of the church, not only was God pleased to dwell in Jesus, but He was also pleased to "reconcile to himself all things" through Jesus. The incarnation alone doesn't fix our big problem, but the death of the incarnate God. "Reconcile" and "making peace" implies a division. Sin has radically disrupted the world, putting us and it at odds with God. But Jesus' death ("the blood of his cross") has dealt with it.

In one sense, only believers are reconciled with God. But on a cosmic scale, the death of Jesus is what will allow "all things" to be put right. Creation will be renewed. Peace will be established. Sometimes peace comes after enemies have been destroyed. One day we will enjoy peace in a reconciled universe thanks to the blood of Jesus' cross.

The two halves of this passage must be kept together. The Jesus who made the world (15-17) is the Jesus who redeems the world (18-20). He is renewing the universe, starting with the church. Let's not underestimate Jesus or what He's doing in us. We need nothing but Jesus to reconcile us and all creation to God. Christians are not missing out on anything!