

Take a moment to consider the unique place we hold as members of the Church. The Church is not only those attending a specific congregation, but the Church also refers to all of Christ's followers over all the world and throughout all time. We are a small part of an immense body, of which Christ is the head.

*What does a literal head do for a literal body and how does that parallel what Jesus does for his metaphoric body of the Church?*

*Ephesians 5:25-27 NIV - 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

As humbling as it is to be a part of the body of Christ, it is even more so that he considers us His bride. Jesus is worthy of first place in our lives because of His deity and His position as creator and sustainer of everything in the universe. As the head of the Church, Jesus gives us direction and purpose and life. But we are also Christ's beloved. If we are not convinced by all of Jesus' other credentials to honor Him as supreme, surely, we are compelled by His self-sacrificing love.

## WRAP-UP

Paul wrote to the Colossian church to warn them about false teaching that could derail their faith by shifting their focus away from Jesus. But through the poetic imagery of his first chapter Paul declares and returns the focus to, the preeminence, and supremacy of Jesus above all things.

## MEMORY VERSE.

***Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,***  
***-Colossians 1:15 NLT***

**PRAYER (20 MIN)** Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

*Challenge - Ask God to reveal to you what persons, institutions, or ideas compete with Jesus for your devotion?*

## **“First Place”**

*Prison Letters- #11*

## INTRODUCTION

This week we begin a study in Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. In this letter Paul expressed his concern over false teaching that had sprung up in the church. He points to the various ways that false teaching can undermine their faith in Jesus and instructs them in living a resurrected life. As Paul begins writing, he includes a poetic description of Jesus as Messiah. In these verses we see that Christ is over and above all things, preeminent, and worthy of first place in our lives.

## Ice Breaker

*When you decide to declutter at your house, what gets highest priority to hang on to- sentimental things, practical things, or things that have a high dollar value?*

## Key Passage

*Colossians 1:15-16 NLT - 15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, 16 for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see--such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.*

## STUDY QUESTIONS

### 1. Image of God

If we take in the full impact of Paul's "poem" in verses 15 -20, we find it fills us with awe to consider just who Jesus is in relationship to all things. To the readers of this letter Paul's imagery must have been astounding. When we behold Jesus, who is it we are gazing upon?

*Colossians 1:15 NLT - 15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,*

*Hebrews 1:3a NLT - 3 The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, ...*

*John 14:9 NLT - 9 Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?"*

Jesus is God wrapped in flesh. While God the Father may not be visible, He made Himself seen through the humanity of Jesus. This is not a mere similarity or partial picture; Jesus is the exact likeness (eikon) of God.

*Hebrews 1:3 says the Son expresses God's character. List any words you would use to describe God's character or essential qualities. Then see if you recall when Jesus demonstrated each quality in His life on earth. (You can start with loving, powerful...)*

*Colossians 1:19 NLT - 19 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ,*

Our list of God's characteristics might not be complete, but Jesus was completely filled with God. Verse 19 tell us God's fullness lived in Christ. There was nothing about Jesus that didn't reflect God. When we seek to know God, we need only look to Jesus.

## **2. Firstborn of Creation**

*Colossians 1:15-17 NIV - 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.*

In his writing, Paul emphasizes why Jesus has supremacy, and preeminence. He uses the term firstborn (*prōtotokos*) to demonstrate this. That may not mean much to us, but it was significant to the culture of Paul's day. The firstborn didn't only mean born before others, although

it can mean that. Firstborn was a term that also defined a position of prominence, one who inherits the authority and property of the father. So, which was Paul using here? The next verse helps clarify that.

*What does verse 16 say was created through Jesus and for Him?*

Paul was not the only one to write about Jesus existing before His birth on earth, that we call His incarnation. John also tells us the Word was in the beginning with God (later in v. 14 he clarifies that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, identifying the Word as Jesus)

*John 1:1-3, 14 NIV - 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ... 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

*According to both Col 1:16 and John 1:2 what was made apart from Jesus? What does Col 1:17 reveal about Jesus' relationship to all of creation? What ways do you think Jesus holds all creation together? How has Jesus held your life together when things felt like they were falling apart?*

## **3. Head of the Church**

*Colossians 1:18 NLT - 18 Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.*

After establishing that Jesus is the image of God and the Firstborn over creation, Paul addresses us, the church. At this point there should be no question that Jesus is the supreme authority as our God, our creator, and our sustainer. Why would Paul specifically bring up the church? Because the church has a unique relationship to Jesus. We are not only His creation, but we are also His body.

*Ephesians 1:21-23 NLT - 21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else--not only in this world but also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.*