

THE DEITY OF CHRIST

Col. 1:15-19, 2:9
 (also Christ as creator, "First Begotten")
 John 3:16
 John 14-17

 John 8:58
 Heb. 13:8
 Heb. 4:15

Only Begotten Son
 Relation to Trinity
 Attributes of Deity (selected)
 Eternity
 Immutability
 Impeccability

THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

Phil. 2:5-11
 (also true kenosis)

In Relation to the Old Testament
 General fulfillment
 Specific fulfillments (selected)

Luke 24:25-27
 Micah 5:2 (preexistence
 place of birth)
 Isa. 53 (saving work)

In Relation to the First Advent
 Virginal conception-birth
 Atonement

Matt. 1:18-25, Luke 1

Unlimited aspect (sufficient)
 Limited aspect (efficient)

1 John 2:2
 Matt. 20:28=Mark 10:45

Redemption, Propitiation (see Soter)
 Reconciliation
 Resurrection (Last Adam)
 Ascension

Rom. 3:21-26
 2 Cor. 5:17-21
 1 Cor. 15
 Acts 1:9-12

In Relation to the Church
 Offices

Prophet
 Priest
 King (see Second Advent)

Matt. 13:57, John 1
 Feb. 5-10
 Matt. 20:1-10

Figures (selected, see Ecclesiology)

Head
 Bridegroom
 Vine
 Cornerstone

1 Cor. 12
 Eph. 5:25-33
 John 15:1-17
 1 Peter 2:4-8

Functions (selected)

Advocate (see Unlimited Aton.)
 Answering prayer

1 John 2:1
 John 14:13-14

In Relation to the Second Advent

Pre-trib rapture
 Second advent

1 Thess. 4:13-18
 Rev. 19:11 ff., Matt.
 24:27-30

Millennial reign

Rev. 20

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of the Study of Christology

When we read the N.T., we quickly become aware of the fact that the person and work of Christ (i.e. Christology) is central. It is central not merely to the "theology" of the New Testament writers; it is central to the day-to-day lives of the N.T. Christians.

When we say that Christology is of central importance, what we are affirming is that Christ is like no other person who has ever existed or could exist. The Scriptures declare Him to be fully God and yet fully man, not in a pantheistic sense, but in a theistic sense. Christianity makes claims about its Christ which no other religion makes about its leaders. We affirm that Christ is set apart by His very nature from all other men. Therefore, Christianity itself is distinct from all other religions. Any type of world ecumenism is ruled out by the unique person, work and claims "of" and "for" Jesus of Nazareth.

Christology has been the source of controversies since the early Church. The Church, however, very early determined its position of this doctrine. Contemporary denials of Christ's deity or manhood or some other aspect of His person and work are really no different from the heresies which the early Church councils overthrew. Few would deny the importance of Jesus Christ, but many would dethrone Him. They would give him prominence but not preeminence.

The Importance of Colossians 1-2

Many commentators have rightly proclaimed that this passage is of primary importance in the study of Christology. T. L. Trevethan writes: "The foundation of the argument of the letter to the Colossians is found in 2:9-10. The gospel, Christian truth, has its source in Jesus. He is the crown of God's revelation because 'in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (2:9). There is no stronger statement of the full deity of our Lord Jesus in the Scripture" (Our Joyful Confidence, IVP, 1981, p. 13). W. R. Nicholson says, "as a Christological statement, it has scarcely an equal, certainly no superior." Likewise, F. F. Bruce writes: "This is one of the great Christological passages of the N.T., declaring as it does our Lord's divine essence, pre-existence, and creative agency" (New International Commentary, p. 192).

The deity of Christ (He possesses a fully divine nature [without compromising a fully human nature in His person]) is the foundation and focus of His uniqueness and Christian identity. This fact alone makes Him uniquely distinctive (in kind) from other religious leaders or anyone else, even in the face of increasing "New Age" ideology.

The Background of Colossians

Why did Paul write to the Colossians? What issues was he trying to settle in this letter? Here scholars disagree, to some extent. All seem to feel that the Colossians were beset by a syncretism of religious streams. An incipient gnosticism with a Jewish influence seems to have been the problem.

The three streams of teaching flowing into the area were a declining Hellenism, paganism, and Judaism. The Judaistic influences were particularly puritanical and bred asceticism in the extreme. Some suspect possibly an Essene element or influence. The Hellenistic beliefs were a modified Gnosticism, with its dualistic view of the universe (material vs. spiritual) leading to either asceticism or libertarianism. And the local pagan climate included superstitious occultism with its mystical rites. These three streams tended to blend together into a pseudo-philosophical soup of mystery cults.

Hence, the issue which must have confronted the Colossian Christians was how Christ "fit into" such a culture. (We see this sort of issue illustrated in Acts 19:13-16). The danger which they faced was in blending the pure Gospel of Christ with the "religiosophy" of the surrounding culture — i.e., syncretistic Christianity. This same problem is a challenge we face today!

Paul writes to these believers to remind them of the preeminence of Christ and of what He has done for them, (i.e. His person and work), warning them against man-made religiosity, as well as instructing them in proper Christian conduct in light of these truths. His purpose seems to be to counter the persuasive arguments of the false teachers who were apparently well-received at Colossae, and instead to help these believers on to a "true knowledge of God's mystery — Christ Himself" (2:2).

Most important is the context beginning in 1:13. Verses 13-14 prepare us for the section which follows, explaining that God the Father has graciously transferred the Colossians into a new spiritual sphere — the "kingdom of His beloved Son". The thrust of this truth is plain: the Colossians are no longer a part of the evil, demonic, worldly system.

Exposition of 1:15-23 (Background)

The Colossians belong to "the kingdom of God's beloved Son." Paul moves to consider the King of this kingdom. He demonstrates that Christ is preeminent in four areas: 1) Communication, 2) Creation, 3) the Church and 4) the Christian individual. Some view verses 15-20 of this text as an early Christian hymn (cf. also Phil. 2:6-11). Rhythmical prose with a strophic arrangement can be discerned. The analysis of Bruce at this point (following others) seems for the most part accurate. "The strophic arrangement is indicated by the repetition of key words or phrases. There appear to be two strophes vs. 15-16 and 18b-20 with vs. 17-18a supplying a transitional link between them" (*Bib Sac* 1984, p. 100). Parallel phrases and reoccurring key words are clearly evident. That these verses constitute a "Christ Hymn" exalting the Son as the Supreme Lord seems a correct analysis.

I. Christ is Lord of Communication 1:15
* (the key verse)

Image (*eikon*) of the invisible God (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), a word meaning likeness, representation, image, form, manifestation and reflection.

This is a relative term in which the degree of likeness must be inferred from the context. The word is used 23 times in the N.T., but only twice with reference to Jesus. For non-exact representation one may note Rom. 1:23 for idolatry in addition to the concept of man as the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27).

With reference to Christ (as here and 2 Cor.4:4) it is used of precise and absolute correspondence, the perfect visible manifestation of our invisible God. He is the representation and manifestation of God who is invisible.

TDNT, II.389, "The peculiarity of the expression is related to that of the ancient concept, which does not limit image to a functional representation present to human sense but also thinks of it in terms of an emanation of a revelation of the being with substantial participation *metoche* in the object ... It has a share in the reality. Indeed, it is the reality. Thus *eikon*, does not imply a weakening or a feeble copy of something. It implies the illumination of its inner core and essence."

Vine writes: "the word involves the two ideas of representation and manifestation. 'The idea of perfection does not lie in the word itself, but must be sought from the context' (Lightfoot)" (An Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words, p. 246, 2nd. section).

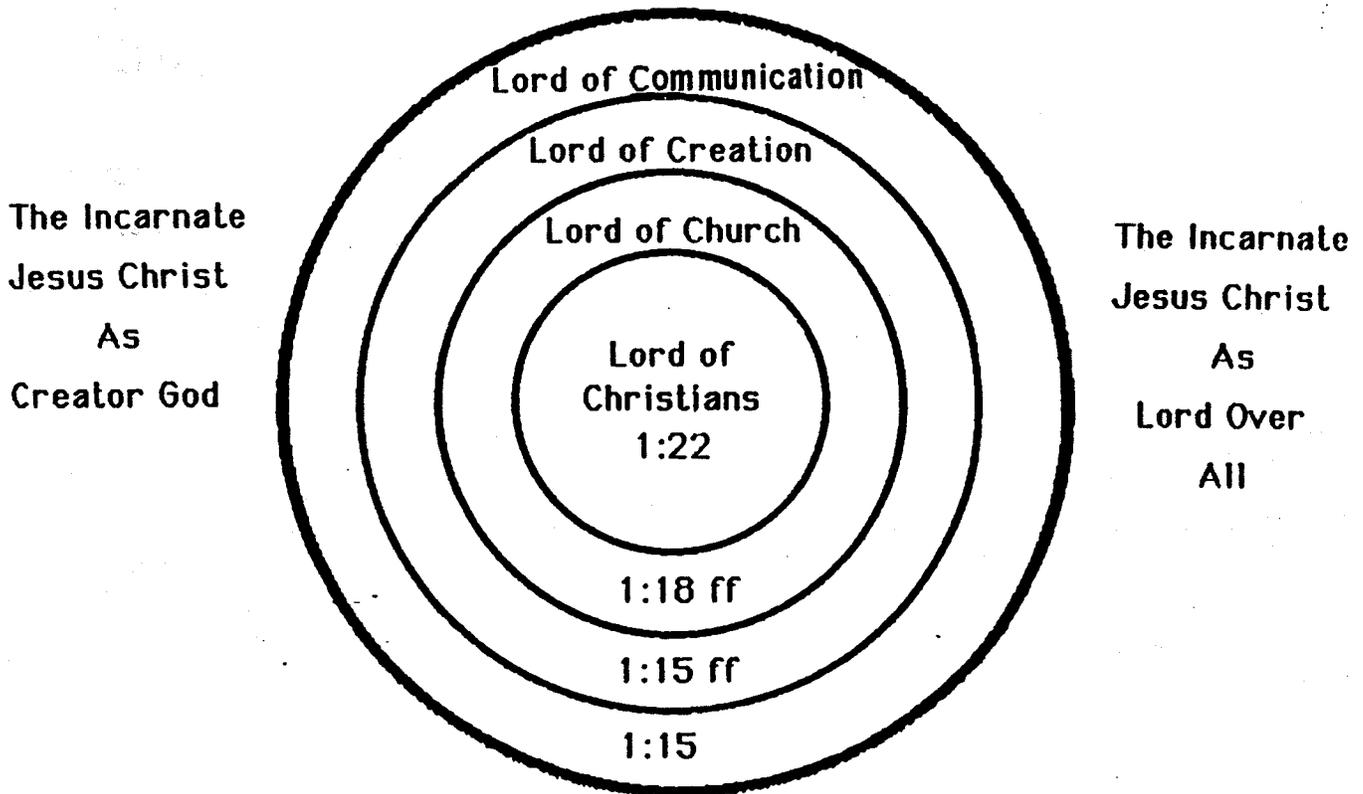
Again, an *eikon* can mean an inexact replica of something intended to stand for that something. For example, in Rom. 1:23, men construct "images" of God and worship them as if they were God, even though they have no relationship to God.

Here, however, and in some other passages (e.g. 2 Cor. 4:4), *eikon* means that Christ is "essentially and absolutely the perfect expression and representation of the Archetype, God the Father ... 'the image of the invisible God' gives the additional thought suggested by the word 'invisible' that Christ is the visible representation and manifestation of God to created beings" (Vine, p. 247). Christ is (present tense) the image of God in the sense that the nature and being of God is perfectly revealed in Him. Adam may have been created in God's image, but Christ is God's image. He brings to light and makes knowable the God who, both to our physical and inward eyes, is invisible.

What is important to see here is that Paul wants the Colossians to realize that Christ is God. If you want to see and know God, then look at and believe in Christ. Christ is not simply a "picture" of what God is like; He is very God Himself. As Jesus said Himself, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), and again "before Abraham was born, I AM" (John 8:58 = Exodus 3:14). This is an explicit affirmation of Christ's divine essence. Some see a "wisdom motif" behind Paul's use of the word as in Prov. 8:22-23; Ecclesiasticus 1:4-5; 24:9 (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:3). Others identify an "Adam Christology" background (cf. Gen. 1:26 f). Helyer accurately notes that no single motif or theme is able to provide a comprehensive view of the Christ-Hymn. The soteriological context would point to the text as Paul's argument for affirming

Christ as Lord, both of the cosmos (His material creation) and the Church (His spiritual creation).

Christology in Colossians 1:15-23 (His Preeminence Over All Things)



II. Christ is the Lord of Creation 1:15-17

Firstborn (*prototokos*) - both a "kind" word and a "time" word. It may be either/or, or both/and. Here it conveys the ideas of primacy, priority, and supremacy; of priority in time and supremacy in rank. The word thus has both a temporal and positional sense. To understand this term, particularly as it is applied to Christ, one must rid his mind of the idea that Christ is somehow the first of a long succession of creatures. As we shall see, Christ is not a creature, but the Creator Himself. Moreover, this term especially points to the preeminence and pre-existence of Christ.

The term originally had the idea that the first son of the family inherited the rights of the family, name, property, etc ... In fact, in some cases, his primogeniture (i.e., his "first-born-ness") made him uniquely eligible to be the king. Ps. 89:27 should be noted in this context, pointing to Messiah's special position of honor.

In 1:15b, Paul has in mind that Christ is God the Father's first (and only) Son. Not that Christ was ever somehow "born" to God, but rather that in His relationship to the Father in the Trinity, He enjoys all of the rights and privileges which the Father bestows upon Him. This includes the right to oversee the creation of all things, a creation that was created by Him, for, and in Him. He is creation's conception, continuance and consummation.

In Colossians it obviously has the nuance of supremacy and preeminence from the expressions which follow (16-17); source-agent and preserver of creation worthy of all honor. It is Christ as sustainer ("holds all things together") who makes the universe a cosmos instead of a chaos. A rare word in the N.T. *prototokos* is used twice here because of its emphasis upon divine preeminence as applied to the structure of the passage (universal creation and the new creation of the Church).

This is an explicit affirmation of Christ's divine function (or divine works). Paul's point is that Christ is the Creator, preeminent over every creature. A Jew such as Paul could only conceive of God as being the Creator. Further, since Christ created "all things," He Himself must be uncreated or the statement is untrue. Note that the word "create" occurs twice in v. 16, the first in the aorist tense and the second in the perfect. The aorist looks back to the creation as an act, while the perfect affirms it as still remaining, a testimony and monument and proof of His creative might. Therefore, Christ is God. He is pre-existent and pre-eminent over all creation as its God.

III. Christ is the Lord of the Church 1:18-20

He is the head of the body (18a), the church. The church owes Him exclusive allegiance, complete devotion and total obedience. This type of commitment is reserved only for God, and thus for Christ because He is God. To be head of the church is to be its "directing brain," its sovereign, chief, leader. He guides and governs it. The pronoun ("he") is emphatic, meaning Christ and no other is head. He alone is its Lord and Ruler.

Notice that once again we have the term *prototokos* in v. 18b: "He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead." Beginning (Gr. *arche*) may mean: 1) supremacy in rank; 2) precedence in time or 3) creative initiative. All three ideas are true, though creative initiative seems to be the idea Paul desires to convey (Vaughn, Colossians, p. 41). We saw that *prototokos* had to do with reference to Christ's position as Creator of all things. It is a word denoting source and preeminence. Here, it has to do with the fact that He conquered death in His resurrection. He is sovereign even over death. "His resurrection is His title to the headship of the Church" (Abbott). Paul's point, therefore, is that Christ has full rights over the Church because He conquered the great enemy of man, death. In so doing, He proved Himself to be God! Hence, v. 18c sums up the matter: Christ should have first place in everything! He is the source of the Church's life and deserves all the rights which accrue to such a source (cf. 3:11).

Verses 19-20 demonstrate Christ's unique position as the Mediator who stands between God and man.

Christ is able to do this first because He is fully God. This is the meaning of v. 19, where Paul explains that in Christ, we see the very essence of God. "All the fullness" means that Christ lacks nothing of what it means to be God. He possesses all the attributes of God (e.g., saving grace, love, goodness, light, omniscience, etc.). The word "fullness" was probably a technical term in the vocabulary of the false teachers. Paul uses this word eight times in this letter. It has the sense of "undiluted," "unalloyed;" Christ is "pure deity," i.e. "the sum total of all the divine power and attributes."

The words, "dwell in Him" has the idea of continuum, to be at home permanently, to reside. There was never a time when Christ did not possess deity; He is always God.

Christ is able to mediate between God and man because he reconciled (brought together) them when He came as man and died on the cross (v. 20). The stunning import of v. 20 is that Christ as God allowed Himself to die as a man in order to do away with sin. He is thus the One who brings God and man together. His person and work are intimately tied together.

Paul's point, therefore, is that Christ is preeminent over the Church because He is head of the body. He has conquered death because He is fully God, and He has brought God and man together.

IV. Christ is Lord of the Christian 1:21-23

Paul now applies the doctrine he has presented to the Colossian believers.

First, in vs. 21-22, he explains that Christ, the mediator, has been able to reconcile the Colossian Christians to God, despite their initial hostility and sin. 2 Cor. 5:17-21 informs us that reconciliation transforms men, appeases God's wrath and comes only through Christ, the sinless substitute.

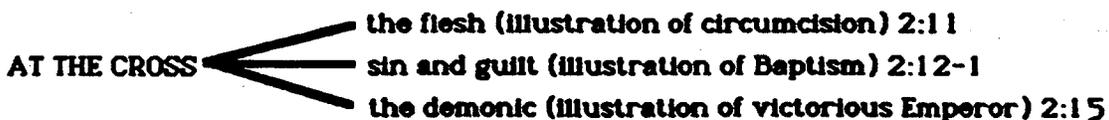
Secondly, Paul declares that Christ can be counted on to take the Colossians on to a complete spiritual transformation, so that they will become people acceptable to the Father. Their responsibility is to continue on in the faith as they originally heard it and believed it — not to fall away into syncretistic errors. "Holy" means separated from sin and unto the Saviour for his service and sanctifying work. Here it has a positional sense meaning cleansed from all sin and looks to our relationship to God. "Without blemish" means faultless and without blemish and relates to ourselves. "Free from accusation" means above reproach, unreprouvable, blameless. This phrase looks to our relation and status with others.

Hence, Christ's preeminence is of the utmost importance to the personal lives and destiny of the Colossian believers.

**Paul's Affirmation in Colossians 2:8-15
(Our Position in Him)**

**As the Incarnate Savior God
"Christ Jesus the Lord" provides
a complete and sufficient
relationship for His believers.**

He removed the power of:



* A supplement: 2:9-10

v. 9 begins with "for," which means that Paul is giving the reason why the Colossians should avoid the false teachers and instead stick with Christ.

This reason is because in Him (Christ), "all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form." "In Him" is emphatic and exclusive emphasizing incarnation. It recalls 1:19. "All the fullness" emphasizes comprehensiveness and completeness. This reiterates that Christ is completely God: there is nothing about Christ that is not God; there is nothing about God that Christ is not.

The word here for "deity" (*theotes*) means that Christ is in His essence God! This is different from a similar word, *theiotes*, which means the possession of divine attributes (cf. Rom. 1:20). The word "dwells" (*katoikei*) is in an emphatic position and has a durative force. It means that there was never a time when Christ was not God (cf. 1:19). Paul takes this expression of Christ's deity one step further than in 1:19, by linking it with Christ's incarnation: "bodily form." Paul's point here is that Christ is fully God and fully man. (See Phil. 2:5-11). This verse is therefore one of the New Testament's best verses to show both Christ's deity and Christ's humanity, as well as to show that He is both fully God and fully man at the same time.

Paul goes on to say that this preeminent Christ is the One who has brought completion and filling into the emptiness of the Colossian believers' lives (2:10a).

Christ is likewise the preeminent ruler (2:10b).

Christ, as the preeminent One, has completed all righteousness and has made the Colossians righteous through His Cross (2:11-12).

Christ has brought life to the spiritually dead Colossians, forgiving their sins and cancelling every accusation against them (2:13-14).

And Christ has disarmed and disgraced all the powers who have been holding the world in bondage (2:15).

Paul's point, therefore, in this section, is that Christ sets the Colossians free, through His work on the cross, in a way that the claims of the false teachers never can.

<p style="text-align: center;">CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE PHILOSOPHY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After the tradition of man (Colossians 2:8) 2. After the rudiments of the world (Colossians 2:8) 3. Not after Christ (Colossians 2:8) <p>CHRIST IS NOT ITS:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">SOURCE,</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">SUBSTANCE,</p> <p style="padding-left: 120px;">STANDARD.</p>

CHRIST IS PREEMINENT IN:

Creation
Heaven
Redemption
Salvation
Truth

CONCLUSION

The point to remember from Colossians 1-2 is that Christ is God. The key verses to show this are 1:15; 1:19 and 2:9. Christ is fully and completely God. "With the resurrection of Jesus the earliest community of believers confessed the Lordship of Jesus in terms of His victory over death and His vindication by God, but that this was quickly seen to entail nothing short of the position in creation ascribed to the Kyrios of the O.T. In brief, cosmic Christology was implicit from the beginning of the primitive Church" (Helyer, JETS, 177).

Colossians 1-2: Christological Summary
Christ is exclusively

- 1) εἰκὼν (eikon) _____
 (1:15)=perfect (visible) revelation

- 2) πρωτότοκος (prototokos) _____
 (1:15,18)=pre-eminent (divine) sovereign

- 3) πᾶν πλήρωμα (pan pleroma)

 (1:19; 2:9)=pure deity
 θεότητος (theotetos) (2:9) _____

- 4) κατοικεῖ (katoikei) _____
 (1:19,2:9)=permanent deity

Therefore, walk in Him
 (1:10:2:6)

CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS

1:15-23

- I. He is Lord of communication 1:15 (revealer)
- II. He is Lord of creation 1:15-17 (creator)
- III. He is Lord of the church 1:18-20 (leader)
- IV. He is Lord of the Christian 1:21-23 (reconciler)

Paul gives his glorious full-length portrait of the *real* Christ who became our Saviour. It is well to set out separately the seven super-glorious features:

1. "The visible form of the invisible God."
2. "The Prior-Heir of all creation."
3. "In Him the universe was created."
4. "He *IS* before the universe."
5. "In Him the universe coheres."
6. "The Head of the body, the Church."
7. "The Firstborn from among the dead."

Paul affirms therefore:

- * *divine essence*
- * *pre-existence*
- * *creative agency*

JESUS CHRIST



CREATOR

SUSTAINER

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The Lordship of Jesus Christ

(Colossians 1:15-23)

- I. He is Lord of communication (revealer) 1:15
- 1) He is the representation of God (God's reflection)
 - 2) He is the manifestation of God (God's revelation)
- II. He is Lord of creation (creator) 1:15-17
- 1) He is Lord because of His sovereignty 1:15
 - 2) He is Lord because of His priority 1:15
 - 3) He is Lord because of His agency 1:16
 - 4) He is Lord because of His authority 1:16
 - 5) He is Lord because of His primacy 1:17
 - 6) He is Lord because of His consistency 1:17
- III. He is Lord of the Church (leader) 1:18-20
- 1) Because He is first 1:18
 - A) In His position
 - B) In His resurrection
 - 2) Because He has fullness 1:19
 - 3) Because He has provided forgiveness 1:20
- IV. He is Lord of the Christian (reconciler) 1:21-23
- 1) He solves our alienation 1:21
 - 2) He provides our reconciliation 1:22
 - 3) He desires our sanctification 1:22-23
 - 4) He encourages our proclamation 1:23

EXEGETICAL OUTLINE: Colossians 1:15-20

I. JESUS (GOD'S BELOVED SON - v. 14) IS THE LIKENESS AND MANIFESTATION OF GOD, WHO IS INVISIBLE. (15a)

II. JESUS IS PRE-EXISTENT AND SOVEREIGN OVER ALL BECAUSE ALL THINGS (INCLUDING THE ANGELIC POWERS OF THE COLOSSIANS HERESY) HAVE BEEN CREATED IN HIM, THROUGH HIM, AND FOR HIM, AND BECAUSE HE SUSTAINS THEM. (15b-17)

A. Jesus is pre-existent and sovereign over every creature. (15b)

B. The reason that Jesus is pre-existent and sovereign over every creature is because all things (including the angelic powers of the Colossians heresy) have been created in Him, through Him and for Him. (16)

C. Jesus is pre-existent and pre-eminent over all. (17a)

D. The reason that Jesus is pre-existent and sovereign over all is because He sustains all things. (17b)

III. JESUS IS PRE-EXISTENT AND SOVEREIGN OVER THE CHURCH BECAUSE HE IS ITS BEGINNING, THE HABITATION OF ALL DIVINE ATTRIBUTES, AND THE AGENT OF GOD'S RECONCILING WORK. (18-20)

A. Jesus is sovereign over the church. (18a)

B. The reason Jesus is sovereign over the Church is because He is its beginning, its sovereign first-born from the dead. (18b)

C. The purpose of Jesus' being the beginning of the Church, its sovereign first-born, is so that in all things - new creation as well as old - He might be pre-eminent. (18c)

D. The reason why the Son is pre-eminent in the Church is because God was pleased that all the fullness of the divine attributes take up their abode in Him. (19)

E. The reason why Christ is pre-eminent in the Church is because God was pleased to reconcile to Himself, through Him all things - whether on earth or in heaven. (20)

F. The means by which God reconciled all things to Himself was through Jesus' death on the cross. (20)

IDEA:

JESUS, THE LIKENESS AND MANIFESTATION OF GOD, IS PRE-EMINENT IN BOTH CREATION AND THE CHURCH BECAUSE HE WAS THE CREATING AGENT AND IS SOVEREIGN IN EACH.

EXEGETICAL OUTLINE: Colossians 1:21-23

I. THE MEANS BY WHICH THE COLOSSIANS (WHO WERE FORMERLY ALIENATED FROM GOD) HAVE BEEN RESTORED TO A FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS THROUGH THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF CHRIST. (21-22b)

A. The Colossians were formerly (in their pre-Christian state) alienated from God, and this alienation was manifested by their hostile thinking and their evil actions. (21)

B. The Colossians are presently (in their Christian state) restored to a friendly relationship with God. (22a)

C. The means by which the Colossians have been restored to friendly relationship with God is through the sacrificial death of Christ. (22b)

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE COLOSSIANS BEING RESTORED TO A FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS SO THAT THEY MIGHT BE PRESENTED TO GOD (AT HIS COMING) IN A HOLY, PURE AND BLAMELESS STATE. (22c)

III. THE RESULT OF [FAITHFULLY ADHERING TO THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL - WHICH IS THE ONLY FIXED GROUND OF CHRISTIAN HOPE] IS THAT [THE COLOSSIANS WILL BE PRESENTED TO GOD (AT HIS COMING) IN A HOLY, PURE AND BLAMELESS STATE]. (23)

IDEA:

THE PURPOSE OF THE COLOSSIANS (WHO WERE FORMERLY ALIENATED FROM GOD) BEING RESTORED TO A FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF CHRIST IS THAT THEY MIGHT BE PRESENTED TO GOD (AT HIS COMING) IN A HOLY, PURE AND BLAMELESS STATE BY FAITHFULLY ADHERING TO THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL.