

JESUS CHRIST, OUR ALL IN ALL

A Study of Colossians

STUDY THREE

Crowning Christ as Lord of All

Colossians 1:15–23

God is not reconciled to humankind; we are reconciled to God. It's very important that we see it that way. We are the ones who have sinned. We are the ones who have caused the disharmony, and if there is to be harmony, then sin must be dealt with. As a result, the initiative and the action for reconciliation must come from God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A letter from Pliny the Younger offers us a non-Christian glimpse into the early Christian church. Roman Emperor Trajan commissioned Pliny as a governor of Bithynia from AD 111–113. There, Pliny encountered Christians and wrote about them to Trajan, asking how he should deal with their refusal to worship Roman gods.

According to Pliny, the Christians “were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god.”¹

Members of the early church habitually met to hear from God through Scripture, to pray, to take the Lord's Supper, and to sing hymns. These hymns united, strengthened, and educated them because of the songs' ornate combination of memorable melodies and rich theology. These hymns shaped their hearts and minds around the glory of Christ . . . just like many hymns today.

Remarkably, we still have access to one of these early hymns! It's our focus for this study, which is Colossians 1:15–23. This short poem stands as one of the highest theological peaks in the New Testament, so pack your gear because we're hiking to the top!



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Colossians 1:15–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer is always the first step of our spiritual climb. Pray that this study brings you into a greater appreciation of Christ's work on your behalf as you gain a deeper understanding of His eternal nature and plan. Record your prayer below.

Hymns are deep and worshipful. They remind us of the great truths of the faith. They communicate a definite message, and when written well, they have singable tunes where there is a progression of truth taught throughout. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The false teachers minimized the person and role of Jesus. They sought to lure the believers in Colossae away from the truth, singing: “He’s a god among many—acknowledge them all, so you don’t anger any. No touching this, stop tasting that. And never forget your holy-day list.”

But as you’ll see, Paul sang a much better tune . . . that Christ’s supremacy in *all* things makes Him—and Him alone—sufficient for *our* lives.



Observation: An Ancient Hymn Exalting Christ

Begin observation by reading through *Colossians 1:15–23* several times. Read it aloud to yourself. Use a couple of translations to really cement its words in your mind. Pastor Chuck’s favorites are the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible.

Next, simply write down what each verse claims about Christ’s person, His status compared to creation, and His actions within and upon creation.



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Three claims in *Colossians 1:15*:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Two claims in *Colossians 1:16*:

1. _____
2. _____

Two claims in *Colossians 1:17*:

1. _____
2. _____

Jesus is supreme in the act of creation. We are not to worship the earth or anything in it. We're to worship the one who created the earth, Jesus, the one through whom and for whom it was created. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Four claims in *Colossians 1:18*:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



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One claim in *Colossians 1:19*:

1. _____

It is Christ who is to be exalted. Christ is the one who is to occupy first place in our thinking, in our motives, in our preaching, in our gathering together, in our commitment to missions. Christ is first in the church. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Two claims in *Colossians 1:20*:

1. _____

2. _____

Now briefly summarize how Paul applied his cosmic statements about Jesus to the local believers in Colossae (*Colossians 1:21–22*).

What responsibility did Paul assign to the Colossians as participants in God's grand story (*1:23*)?



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New Testament scholar David Garland precisely summarizes this dense passage:

Paul anchors Christ’s cosmic supremacy in salvation history and in his Lordship over the church. The image of the invisible God entered the plane of human experience in order to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth by means of his humiliating death. Christ establishes his Lordship in house churches, prison cells, and families, as well as in the furthest reaches of the heavens.²



Interpretation: Defining Supremacy

When we interpret a passage, we ask certain questions and examine additional *Bible study resources* to gain clarity regarding the following categories:

1. The cultural, biblical, and historical context
2. The literary genre and use of language
3. The author’s intent for writing
4. The author’s beliefs, assumed and stated, about God and life

Item 4 is always the most important and our goal in interpretation. For this study, item 1 is especially important to help us reach that goal. What did Paul mean when he said, “Christ is the visible image of the invisible God” (*Colossians 1:15*), and what significance does this statement hold for the rest of *1:15–17*?



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What did Paul mean when he said, “Christ is also the head of the church” (*Colossians 1:18*), and what did Jesus do to claim this position? How did the blood of Christ create peace? What kind of peace?

Don't let anyone tell you that Christ's shed blood isn't important. It is the divine detergent that washes away the sins of the world. Without the blood, you have no hope of having your sins washed away. But because Jesus gave His blood on our behalf, God acknowledges the blood as that which brings reconciliation and, now, we are right with God, rather than living fearful of Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Lastly, describe what Paul meant in his exhortation to the Colossians in [1:23](#). What does it look like in everyday living to “believe this truth” and “stand firmly in it”? What is significant about Paul’s command to the Colossians not to drift *from the assurance* they received when they heard the good news?

When you believe in Christ as Savior, you become united with Him in His relationship with the Father. God counts you as His own in Christ. His blamelessness becomes yours. His holiness becomes yours. His eternal inheritance becomes your eternal inheritance. His access to the Father becomes your access to the Father.



Correlation: Every Knee Shall Bow

We read another hymn to Christ in Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi—a letter which he probably wrote at the same time he wrote to the church in Colossae. Paul recorded the hymn for his readers’ instruction like he did with his hymn in Colossians.



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Read *Philippians 2:1–11*. The first five verses contain the life-lesson, and the last six verses contain the song. What key life-lesson did Paul draw from the hymn? How did Paul get that life-lesson from the hymn?

Jesus is coequal, coeternal, coexistent with the Father and with the Spirit. In the form of the Godhead, before any of what we call today's world or the surrounding galaxies around us existed, He was there. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: Taking Responsibility

Two applications come from today's passage. We receive them after learning from Paul how Jesus reconciled the cosmos to Himself. In *Colossians 1:21–22*, he highlighted the salvation they received. In *Colossians 1:23*, he highlighted their need to hold fast to the one who saved them.

First, *recall the path and outcome of your life prior to believing in Jesus*. Perhaps you believed from a young age and God graciously prevented you from shipwrecking your life. Or, perhaps, you were destitute of happiness and hope—at the very end of yourself—and all kinds of evil thoughts and actions directed your course of life.

Regardless of your past, now you have been brought near to God by faith in His Son who died and conquered the grave for you. Simply record a prayer of thanksgiving listing what He saved you from and how He gave you new life and hope.



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Second, *examine the strength of your faith*. Are you standing firm in the truth which you have believed from the day you were saved? What temptations do you encounter that might cause you to drift? Record below your plan to keep the gospel central in your heart and mind, hands and mouth. This kind of planning helps you combat any deception from false teaching or even self-deceit.

Today, we continue in the same habit as Christians have done from the beginning—singing hymns “to Christ as to a god.” Because He is God—maker of all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Yet, He’s not only maker, He’s our reconciler who spilled His own blood that we might have eternal union with Him and peace in Him. *That’s something worth singing about!*



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending Your Son and creating peace between us. You harnessed all that is divine, namely Yourself, to pave the way for our union together. In You, I have fullness of joy. I simply ask that You firm up my faith in You and help me to stand strong in the truth without drifting. The gospel of Your Son is good news indeed! In His strong name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Pliny the Younger, “#102: Pliny’s Letter to Trajan,” ed. Dan Graves, Christian History Institute, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/pliny>.
2. David E. Garland, *NIV Application Commentary: Colossians and Philemon*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 90.

