

## **Christ: Systematic Summary of Christology, V**

According to schedule, we are to finish up the person of Christ soon with topics including His deity, His humanity, His uni-personality, and the two states of Christ. I am trying to balance exposition of the great Christological passages with systematic theology though I want the theology to come out of the Scriptures. We need to be not only using the Bible in a proof-texting fashion, but also showing the way the passages fit together. In that regard, just before we turn to the topic of the deity of Christ, let me outline the Colossians passage.

I told you last time the great passages are John 1 and Philippians 2— which we have taken a little look at—and Hebrews 1 and Colossians 1. Concerning the Colossians passage, an overview is in order. Of Colossians 1, the great passage is in verses 15 through 20. The study Bibles that talk about the supremacy of Christ are exactly right because that is the theme. We can talk about two spheres over which Christ is supreme: the creation and the church, also called the new creation. Verses concerning the creation are 15-17, and those concerning the church are 18-20. In referring back to verses 13 and 14, God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. In Paul's introduction to Colossians, he prays for his readers. In 1:15 he says,

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the first born from among the dead, so that in everything"—in context it seems to me, in creation and in the new creation—"He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

This is a classic Pauline passage, packed full, though we can only touch lightly on the ideas. "He is the image of the invisible God." The difference between our being the image of God and Christ being the image of God is between creatures and God Himself. I believe verse 15 speaks of the Incarnation of Christ. He is the invisible God made manifest. He is "the first born over all creation." Do not let cultists mislead you by talking about who your firstborn is and then reading that into the Bible. We need to stay in the world of the Bible to understand its ideas. There are some parallels between our customs and biblical customs, but the background for this notion is the Old Testament. Indeed, firstborn speaks sometimes of literal children, but the meaning here is plainly not creature because of the tie-in between verses 16 and 15. Verse 16 says, "By Him all things were created." To add into the text the word "other" as some of the cults do is a turning backward of the passage. We can find in the Old Testament the sense of firstborn that fits very well here when we look at Jacob and Esau. Esau was literally the firstborn, but Jacob became the firstborn. Jacob was not technically the first to enter the world of the twins, but he became the firstborn in terms of rank and privilege. Thus "firstborn" speaks of the highest one or the preeminent one; this fits the context well, which speaks of Christ's supremacy.

Psalm 89:27 is a particularly good source for studying the Old Testament background of the usage here in Colossians 1, because it is in a context speaking of David looking forward to the son of David who would rule—the Messiah. Psalm 89:27 says, "I will also appoint Him my firstborn,"—notice the amplification—"the most exalted of the kings of the earth." Here firstborn does not speak of creature, but rather the highest one, the one with preeminence, the one who was originally. So in Colossians 1:16 the meaning is: Christ is the visible image of the invisible God; He is God incarnate, the highest one

over all creation because by Him all things were made. Paul is putting Christ in the creator circle. We could distinguish all of reality in terms of these two circles: the creator circle and the creature circle. In the Scriptures only the Trinity belongs in the creator circle—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All creatures belong in the other circle, including human beings and angels. Christ, as a matter of fact, is the creator who becomes the creature. He is the God-Man, the Creator-creature. But verse 16 is not talking about that, rather it is talking about Him doing the work of creation. If you look at it very carefully you say, “Is not the Father’s place guarded by the preposition ‘by’?” Yes. “And is not the Son presented as the Father’s agent in creation?” It is true. That is consistent in John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1. One can even see an order to the Trinity in the work of creation, but also notice in which circle Christ belongs here. He belongs in the creator’s circle. He does the work that only God performs. We will see shortly the five great proofs of the deity of Christ. One is that He does works that only God Himself performs. Never in Scripture did human beings or angels create the heavens or the earth. Notice the comprehensive language used to designate the creation: “By Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth,” which is an allusion to Genesis 1:1—the Jewish way of saying “the universe.” “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” “Things in heaven and on earth”—are there any other things? No, that is the sum total of reality.

Here is another way of comprehensively designating reality: “Things visible and invisible.” Would you suggest a third category? That is all there is. Christ created everything visible and invisible. What does He mean by invisible? He himself explains, “Whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities”—these are some differentiations, possibly ranks of angels, used here as created and good. I understand spiritual wickedness in heavenly places is designated by the same terminology, but the terminology per se does not indicate rebellious or bad angels; it just indicates, in this context, angels who are the invisible things or creatures created by the Lord Jesus Christ. So He made all things, He made everything in heaven and on earth, and He made everything visible and invisible, including all the angels. It is impossible for us to perfectly specify the Colossian heresy against which Paul writes. It has ascetic overtones, it has some Jewish features that are mixed in, and it is a complicated thing. There is a love of knowledge and philosophy and some concern for angels—maybe not people worshipping angels, but possibly a prying into the angels’ own worship of God, things that are not revealed—this is speculation. In any case, Paul holds up Christ repeatedly as the antidote to all of this spiritual poison, whatever precisely the sources or the description of it would be. He is the creator of all the angels, so their preoccupation with angels is misguided. He repeats himself at the beginning and end of verse 16: “All things were created by Him.” It is a literary device called “inclusion,” which is the word, phrase, or unit at the beginning and end of a section of literature—it tends to tie it together.

Verse 16 is one of four ways to say what John 1 says: “Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.” The Bible is so emphatic on that. If that is the only thing it said about His work, we would still be obligated to worship Him as our creator, but it says many things. The deity of Christ is plainly and repeatedly taught in the Scriptures and, beyond that, it is implied regularly. When Paul says, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” it implies that Christ is the giver of grace and peace. It makes no sense to say, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the archangel Michael”—you cannot do it—or “From God our Father and the apostle Paul.” It would be blasphemous to talk like that. Christ occupies the slot of God all over the Bible. “Grace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ” is one of the ways Paul closes his letters. He implies Jesus’ deity many places and he sets it forth in many places as well.

“All things were created by Him and for Him.” If the “created by Him” thrust of that is that He is the initiator, the creator, then “all things are created for Him” speaks of Him as the heir, which is what Hebrews 1 calls it. The fact is that not only did He make everything in the beginning, but also that it all

exists for His glory, for His purposes. This is a way of saying what Revelation says and Revelation 1 could be added as another great Christological passage—there are numbers of them. He is “The alpha and the omega.” We would say He is the A and Z, the beginning and the end. He is the A; He is the alpha; He is the creator. He is the Z, the omega; all things have been created for Him. “He is before all things” is not another way of saying He is number one, He is preeminent, but it is more than that. It is saying He is eternal. Human beings and angels are creatures who have a beginning and we exist forever. We are immortal by virtue of God’s gift of immortality. God alone is eternal. We can diagram it by saying immortality goes in one direction; it starts with an X and it has an arrow going in one direction. God has arrows going in both directions; He has no beginning or end. Hear that “eternity” is ascribed to the Son. “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” What work of God does this ascribe to Christ? What do we call this? Providence. According to the shorter catechism, “Providence is God is most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions.” God not only is presented in Scripture as the sole creator, but He is also presented as the sole sustainer. He maintains His creation—preservation—and He directs it toward His ends. The two subsets of providence are preservation and government. Here it is the preservation aspect that is underlined. Notice to whom it ascribes this work: “In Him all things hold together.” I ask you this: do angels or human beings hold all things together? It is absurd, it is ludicrous. For some of these reasons that I am sharing with you, cultists through great travail of soul have been saved. People working in The Watchtower Headquarters of the so-called Jehovah’s Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York, reading their own mistranslation of the Bible, the New World Translation—I call it mistranslation because it is against Jesus’ deity from the beginning, but it still teaches His deity—and through great pain changed their views. Religious truth makes an imprint on the soul. To change your views about something else is not nearly as significant as changing the views that you were taught concerning God and matters pertaining to the afterlife by people you respect. It is agonizing to change those views. People have come to know the Lord even using defective translations designed to disprove that Jesus is God because they still teach He is God and it is verses such as these that demonstrate that very thing. “In Him all things hold together”; He does the work of providence.

So verses 15-17 indeed show He is preeminent over creation. He made it. He holds it together. He is its goal, its consummator, and He is eternal with reference to it. Verses 18-20 teach He is preeminent over the church. “He is the head of the body, the church.” He is the preeminent one over the members of the church. “He is the beginning,” a strange expression to us. It is a harkening back to Genesis 1 again but speaks here not as in verse 16, whose allusion to Genesis 1:1 is in reference to heaven and earth, but now it is an allusion to Genesis 1:1 not of the physical creation but of the spiritual new creation of God. When it says, “He is the beginning,” it means that Christ is the source of the new creation. He was the giver of life to the physical creation, and He is the giver of life to the church. He is the Savior and anyone who has life and is part of the church has received life from He who is the second and last Adam (from 1 Corinthians 15) who is the source of life of the church. He is “the firstborn”—this is the same term, but this time it does not mean over all creation, but over the new creation—“He is the firstborn from the dead.” It proves that it is not literal first-ness that is emphasized, but preeminence because, technically, He was not the first one to rise. As you know He raised Jairus’ daughter, Lazarus, and the widow of Nain’s son in His own ministry, but He is indeed the preeminent one to rise. The others were resuscitated and died again, but His resurrection was in anticipation of the resurrection of the last day. “Because I live,”—He told His disciples in John 14:19—“you also will live.” Because of His resurrection we gain eternal life now, we gain the resurrection of the dead, and all the attendant benefits with that on the last day. “He is the firstborn from among the dead so that”—here is the purpose of all of this—“in everything He might have supremacy”—that He might have the first place over the creation and over the new creation. “Because God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him.” Correlate 1:19 with 2:9. Colossians 2:8-10 says, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and

deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given the fullness of Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” You are complete in Him and not lacking anything. You do not need any secret teaching. You do not need any spiritual practices that you have not been doing with regard to food and so forth. The end of Colossians 2 shows that in Christ you have all that you need for eternal life and godliness. Why is that so? Because “In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.” If we had time, I would like to have you distinguish between the Holy Spirit indwelling believers and what Colossians 2:9 and 1:19 say about the Son of God. How is the Holy Spirit indwelling us different from “All the fullness of deity living in bodily form” in Christ? Here is how it usually goes: He has all the fullness and we do not. Are you really going to parcel the Holy Spirit out and divide Him up so that if another 1,000 people get saved tomorrow then the Holy Spirit has been shrunk? It makes no sense. No, we have all the fullness of God who is the Holy Spirit. Every believer has the fullness in that sense. I am not talking about filling with the Spirit which has to do with our own living for God, consecration to God, and His real control over our lives, rather I am saying the Holy Spirit is God and God cannot be reduced and subdivided and shrunk. So the difference between Christ having the fullness of deity dwelling in Him bodily and our having the Holy Spirit is not a percentage of God. The difference is rather between Him being God incarnate and us being creatures who are fallen and redeemed and given the Spirit of God. We are redeemed. Christ is God who became a human being. We could point to another Christian and say, “The Holy Spirit dwells in Linda.” We cannot point to her and say, “There is God in bodily form.” That would be blasphemy. You could point to Christ and say, “I am pointing to the body of God.” God became a human being. God lives in Him in bodily form. That is not what we say about ourselves. We are sinners saved by grace; we are human beings in whom God dwells. The key is in the expression “in bodily form.” The meaning is in Christ God lives corporally, bodily, in bodily fashion. He is no one else than God incarnate. He is God who became a human being. Our bodies are not the bodies of God. His is. He did not have a body before He became a human being, but He is the God-man and that is the teaching of Colossians 1:19.

“God was pleased to have all of His fullness”—it means of deity—“dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things.” Here is a movement from the person of Christ to the work of Christ. We began this in 1:13-14, which spoke of God switching the citizenship of our kingdom, as it were. We belonged to the dominion of darkness and He transferred our citizenship over to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin. So our passage was introduced by a reference to Christ’s work. It has been speaking about His person as creator and head of the church, and now it specifically mentions His work again in terms of reconciliation or peacemaking. “God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.” I am not going to develop the reference to His saving work except to mention that blood is in verse 20, and body is in verse 22. It is a very physical reference and Christ makes peace between God and us and between us and God. It presupposes alienation, though verse 21 says it directly, and God overcomes the alienation of our sins through making peace by the body and blood, through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the purposes of patterning our learning in our brains, systematic theology artificially separates what God has put together, the person and work of Christ. I am not against it. If we tried to study the person and work of Christ all at once, we would likely get confused, so we separate these things out, but we have to repeatedly remind ourselves along the way that these things belong together. It is not hard to remind ourselves if we work carefully with the Bible, because if you go and study Christ’s person in the Scriptures and move a verse or two in a given context, you bump up against His work. So we take apart for the sake of our learning and then we put back together the person and work of the Son of God.

That is just a bare minimal look at those very important verses. I need to begin teaching the deity of Christ explicitly working with systematic categories. I will refer to Colossians 1 for every one of these that pertains, but also to Hebrews 1. Since God became a human being, the God-Man, Christ Jesus, has two natures: one human and one divine. There are many proofs for the deity of Christ. I am using the five classical proofs of Christ's deity. He has the nature of God, titles of God, qualities that only God possesses, He does works that only God performs, and unlike good men and good angels, He receives the worship of God. Good men and angels reject worship. I will show you that from the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ receives worship. Is anybody prepared to say that He was a bad man or a demon? That is so perverse. No, they say He was a good man and a good teacher. If He was a good teacher and He was not a god then he was not a very good teacher because He was immoral for accepting worship. This is something good men do not do and likewise, good angels cringe at that notion, as we will see from the book of Revelation. Jesus has the nature of God. We saw it in Colossians 1 where Paul said that Christ "is the image of the invisible God." That is the visible manifestation of the invisible God, and in the verses we looked at as well, "all the fullness of deity dwells in Him in bodily form." This is not just God indwelling a body, but God existing in human form.

Likewise, Hebrews 1:3 teaches that Christ is of the very nature of God. The Hebrews passage is worthy of more careful attention than we can give it, but let us do something with it. Hebrews shows a superiority of the Son of God to Old Testament institutions. In the first two verses of chapter 1 it shows a superiority of the Son to Old Testament prophets, and in the rest of chapter 1 it shows a superiority of the Son to the angels. What do prophets and angels have in common in the Old Testament? Prophets and angels are messengers. How are angels messengers? According to Hebrews 2:2, the angels gave the law of God: "The message spoken by angels." I could show you that from other Scriptures, such as in two different places where Stephen says it: Acts 7:38 and Acts 7:53. And Paul says it in Galatians 3:19; Paul says that the law was given through angels. Moses, of course, was involved as well, but thus Hebrews 1 to 2:4. This passage shows the Son is superior to Old Testament mediators. He is superior to prophets, shown in 1:1-2, and He is superior to angels, shown in 1:2 through 2:4. In this section we have a teaching section followed by an application. Hebrews 2:1-4 should be read as the application of chapter 1. I need to work with this passage in order for us to properly draw all five of our proofs, which can come from this passage. Hebrews 1 may be the best, although it is hard to rate these passages. Hebrews 1 is as good as any place in the Bible for showing the deity of Christ. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by his Son."

According to these two verses there are great differences between the old and new dispensations, but there is an underlying similarity—that God is the speaking God. He spoke through the prophets and He spoke through the Son. The differences, of course, are important as well. He spoke to our forefathers then and He has spoken to us now. He spoke through the prophets then and He has spoken by His Son now. In the past He spoke. In these last days He has spoken by His Son tremendous truths about the Son of God, the great prophet of God. Hebrews 1 is a wonderful passage to teach the three offices of Christ: prophet, priest, and king. I will mention His priesthood in a minute. The main idea of Hebrews 1 is His kingship. It actually speaks of His coronation as king, sitting down at God's right hand. The Son, verse 2, "whom He appointed heir of all things," overlaps in meaning with Colossians 1, "And by and for Him all things were created." All things were made for His glory and purposes; He is the end, the omega. God the Father appointed the Son heir of all things. He will inherit it all. "And through whom He made the universe" shows again He is the Father's agent in creation. If God only said it once, we would be obligated to believe it, but He says it again and again—in John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1—the Son does the work of creation. The conclusion is inevitable: the Son is God. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being. What image is used here in this reference to

glory? What is the writer thinking of when he says that the Son is the radiance of God's glory? Before you interpret the image, tell me what the image is. What is the picture of before we interpret it in terms of Christ? Radiance of glory speaks of what? The sun in the sky is presented here and the sun's rays outshining radiance. Now be careful; any even biblical image could be abused. I can tell you how some would interpret this. You should have eight rays there representing the major religious traditions of mankind: Mohammad, Buddha, Confucius, Abraham, and Jesus. He is in the pantheon with the others. No, sorry. It is not teaching multiple radiances, so you cannot milk the image for all it is worth. It likens the sun in the sky to the glory of God and it likens the Son of God to the radiance, not one among many, but to *the* outshining of God. We have identified the picture. The sun sends forth its rays. Interpret the image. If you pattern yourself on the easy ones, you can form a methodology for interpreting the harder ones. This is definitely a harder one because it is not transparent. What is he saying about the Son of God when he says the Son is the radiance of God's glory? The sun is what we can see of the invisible God. You know what it is doing—it is exactly in line with the literary context of the Old Testament mediators and messengers. The Son is the preeminent messenger of God and what a messenger He is. He is the radiance of God's glory. He is God Himself making God known. You cannot bear to look at the sun in the sky. Ancient people may not have been experts in optics and ophthalmology, but they certainly knew if you stared at the sun you were going to go blind. It will ruin your retina. They could learn that by trial and error and they would not stand there by the hour doing that. You cannot bear to look at it straight on, but they also attributed the light and the heat that they enjoyed to the sun in the sky and they were not wrong in that. Here, the Son, the Son of God, is the effulgence, the outshining—the radiance of the invisible glory of God. The chief idea is thus revelation. He makes the invisible God known.

There are two subsidiary ideas that seem bound up in the imagery to me. First is equality. The ray is really the prolongation of the sun; it is the invisible sun made visible. To use the language of Nicea, it is of the same stuff as the sun itself. It is the sun revealed. Secondly, there is a distinction because the ray is not the invisible sun that you cannot look at. It is the sun made visible. It is the notion of incarnation. It is beautiful imagery, is it not? The Son is the radiance of God's glory. It is the writer to the Hebrews' way of saying that the Son of God shares the nature of the invisible God. He does it by adapting that language to his purposes, which are to show Christ superior to Old Testament mediators as God is superior to His creatures. My how God wanted to reveal Himself! He stepped into history Himself and we get the invisible God. It is another way of saying He is the image of the invisible God. Another image is pursued in the same verse. He is also the exact representation of His being. He is the representation of God's essence, essential nature, or being. This image comes from the sphere of minting coins. It speaks of a die and a coin that comes from the die. Christ, the passage says, is the representation of God's essence. Now once again, even biblical imagery could be abused. Is it saying He is a creature? No; it is distinctly not saying He is a creature. It could be said of no creature that He is the representation of the essential nature of God. What is emphasized is revelation. You get on the coin what was in the die and the two other subsidiary ideas come along again. The coin is the exact representation of the die and also the notion of distinction. It is not the die but it is an exact representation of it, thus we have the same three ideas: equality, distinction, but chiefly, revelation. Of the Son it says that He is the exact representation of God's being. That is ascribing to Him the very nature of God.