

“Union with Christ: Its Beginning”
Colossians 1:15-17

In his book, *Reason for God*, Tim Keller, while admitting that while you cannot prove the existence of God in a way that not rationally avoidable, with an “airtight” argument, and, by the way, you cannot prove anything with that degree of certainty, including your own existence, (see *The Matrix*), while there is no airtight argument for God's existence, there are many “clues” for His existence.

One is the “big bang”, the expanding universe.

- Francis Collins: “The very fact that the universe had a beginning means that someone was able to begin it. And it seems to me that had to be outside of nature.”

Another is The Cosmic Welcome Mat.

- 15 main universal constants that have precise values. They are fine tuned for the world to exist as it is.
- If the world was different at all, there would be no life on planet Earth.
- Steven Hawking: “The odds against a universe like ours emerging out of something like the Big Bang are enormous. I think there are clearly religious implications.”

Another is The Regularity of Nature

- Why does the world stay the same? There is no reason for this.
- Science cannot prove why the rules that we observe around us continue. It must take it in faith that they will.

I think the most compelling is The Clue of Beauty

- Why does art move us? Why does music move something within us? Why does something ring true when we hear or see great Art or music?
- If there is not God then the only reason you think something is beautiful is because there is something in your past evolving that associated good things for humans when it was present.
- However when we see beauty that has nothing to do with survival instincts and are moved we realize that something out there must define what is beautiful and we resonate with it when we perceive it.
- We have deep longings for beauty, love, joy that can't be fulfilled by food, sex friendship, or success. These longings within us point to a creator.

Who is this Creator? Is He transcendent, extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience, or imminent, "to be within" or "near" creation?

Last week we began to think about the teaching of the Bible about the possibility, promise and prospect of a person coming into a relationship with God so close, so intimate, that we can become one with God Himself, where we can relate to God as closely as Jesus did with the Heavenly Father by coming into a relationship with Jesus Christ where we become one with Him. Christians call this Union with Christ.

We saw from Eph. 1:3-6 that the Eternal Foundation of the oneness with Christ that God invites you and me to experience is the free loving choice of God that calls them in Christ to Acceptance, to Adoption and to Adoration.

This week we turn to the beginning of the actual human experience of this close, personal relationship with God in His creation of the world.

You see it first in Genesis 1, where God calls matter and energy into existence with His words, then molds them into shapes so they are no longer formless, then breathes life into fish, birds, animals, and finally humanity, giving them the responsibility of taking care of what God has created.

Although it is not apparent in the Old Testament, there are clues from the beginning that this God is relational in His own nature: “let US make man”, the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters, and creation by the Words of God.

John 1 illuminates this in the opening Words of his gospel: John 1:1-3 (NKJV) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

But Jesus is not merely the Author of life, but he himself is life: John 1:4 (NKJV) “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

The apostle Paul unfolds this more fully in this morning’s main text, Col. 1:15-17.

It begins, v. 15 “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”

Christ is described first in relation to his deity, and second in relation to creation.

1. Jesus Christ is first described as Lord.

Paul depicts Christ in terms similar to the presentation of “wisdom” in Proverbs 8 (“When he established the heavens, I [wisdom] was there ... I was beside him, like a master workman” [Prov. 8:27, 30]).

In later Jewish wisdom literature, personified divine wisdom is described as the image of God.

As an “image of God”, “God's beloved Son” is two things:

- A representation of God.
- A manifestation of the Hidden One.

Any picture, therefore, one has of God that does not see Him in Christ is false, and possibly idolatrous.

But He is also “the firstborn over all creation”.

ESVSB: “It would be wrong to think in physical terms here, as if Paul were asserting that the Son had a physical origin or was somehow created (the classic Arian heresy) rather than existing eternally as the Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in the Godhead.”

“What Paul had in mind was the rights and privileges of a firstborn son, especially the son of a monarch who would inherit ruling sovereignty. This is how the expression is used of David: “I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:27).”

“firstborn” does not refer to His origin but his position over creation. The firstborn is the one who is the principal owner and Master.

“prototokos” is the word from which we get “prototype.” It is also used in the OT to refer to the Messiah. So it implies [1] Priority over creation, though not part of it, and [2] Sovereignty over creation: dominion.

TRANS: So Jesus Christ is first described as Lord.

2. Jesus Christ is Maker of all things.

V. 16 says He is both the agent and goal of creation, which places him over the angelic beings the Colossians think they must placate.

v. 16 “For by [in] Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”

ESVSB: “Jesus did not come into existence when he was born of the virgin Mary. He was the agent of creation through whom God made heaven and earth (John 1:3). Jesus cannot be the first thing created (as the ancient Arian heresy claimed) since “all things” without exception were created by him.”

“all things” = the universe

“visible and invisible” = material and immaterial

"thrones or powers or dominions or principalities or powers" are mainly designations of various heavenly beings.

Piper: "Everything from the bottom of the oceans to the top of the mountains, from smallest particle to the biggest star, from the most boring school subject to the most fascinating science, from the ugliest cockroach to the most beautiful human, from the greatest saint to the most wicked genocidal dictator—everything that exists, exists to make the greatness of Christ more fully known—including you, and the person you have the hardest time liking."

"Now Paul knows that these "rulers and authorities" include evil supernatural powers. Look at Colossians 2:15 where Paul celebrates Jesus' triumph on the cross: "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

"They were created by Christ. And why do they exist? Verse 16b: "All things were created through him and for him." They exist for Christ. They exist to make his glories known."

He did not create them evil, but he knew they would fall, "And with infinite wisdom he took it all into account as he planned the history of salvation and the triumphs of grace at Calvary." - Piper

The Colossian church was started by a member of the church at Ephesus named Epaphras, on the basis of the gospel preached by Paul.

But early on it became infected with false teaching that placed undue emphasis on rituals like food regulations and holy days.

The teaching was also influenced by the religion of the local culture, that also gave an inflated role to angelic spirits such as gods of stars, planets and the basic physical elements (earth, wind, fire and water).

We see these things today reflected in New Age practices of astrology and channeling, which take away from or deny Christ as the only mediator.

Because of this, God led Paul to write to them at Colosie to correct the errors they had allowed to come into their Faith.

By extolling the supremacy of Christ in creation and redemption, God, thru Paul, points out the weakness in their Faith, and perhaps in ours as well: an inadequate view of the person of Christ.

ESVSB: "Jesus is not only the agent of creation but is also the goal of creation, for everything was created by him and for him, that is, for his honor and praise. Since Jesus is in this sense the goal of creation, he must be fully God."

Here the Bible tells us that nothing will ever become more powerful than Jesus Christ.

Trans: Jesus Christ is first described as Lord, then as Maker of all things.

3. Jesus Christ is Sustainer of all things.

v. 17 makes explicit what is implicit in v. 16. He is not created, and there was never a time when He did not exist.

v. 17 (ESV) “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

“Christ continually sustains his creation, preventing it from falling into chaos or disintegrating”

cf. Hebrews 1:3 (ESV) “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”.

In Adam we inherit the image of the earthly, in weakness and mortality, but in Christ, we receive the image of the heavenly, in power and immortality.

In Christ, you and I can grow toward becoming what God created us to be: Psalm 8:3-8 (ESV)

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.”

While, on the one hand, there is an eternal difference between God and human, there is also an inherent compatibility between them as well.

We are made in His image, for communion with Him, and are meant to rule ourselves, our families, our communities, and our world to the glory of God and to our own perfect joy and satisfaction.

Our Fall into sin disrupted all this, but in Jesus Christ, God is again putting all things under His control: Hebrews 2:5-9 (ESV) For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

“Where the first Adam failed, ... the second Adam prevailed” -Robert Letham, *Union with Christ*.

Conc: Christ is the Beginning of all things as Lord, Maker and Sustainer. It begins for you and me when we give up trying to be in absolute control of our own domain, and allow Christ to be the Lord.

Action: Confess your own inability to successfully satisfy yourself, as God, or anyone or anything else as Lord and God.

Receive Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, Creator and Sustainer.

Begin by turning over a specific part of your life that you have been keeping back from God.