

THE PRE-EMINENT CHRIST

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." Colossians 1:18.

Living as we do, far down the stream of time from the age when, as it has been said, "the name of Christ has long since attached itself to and associated itself with all that was the most classical in literature, the most refined in art, the most exquisite in poetry. the most generous in chivalry and the most advanced in civilization," it is very difficult for us to project ourselves into that far-off century and to estimate the strangeness with which these words must have fallen upon the ears of those who lived in Paul's day, that Christ, the despised Nazarene, should have the pre-eminence.

Paul opposed Jesus of Nazareth because he did not recognize Him as the Messiah. On the Damascus road, when the light, which was brighter than the Syrian sun at noon-day, shone upon him and he fell to the earth, he learned by that marvelous experience with Him that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Thereafter Paul gave Christ the love and loyalty of his great mind and his noble heart. From that day Christ was the inspiration of his loftiest attainments, the theme of his sublimest discourses and the goal of his greatest ambitions. From that time Paul's dominant motive was to honor Christ in his life. In all his joys and sorrows, as well as in his endeavors and achievements he gave Christ the pre-eminence.

It is doubtful if Paul ever made a greater effort to enthrone Christ at the heart of all Christian thinking than he did in this letter to the Colossians. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the place of supremacy that Paul assigned to his Lord in Colossians 1:14-18, wherein he said: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist: And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." This passage fills a child of God with a supreme sense of the majesty and glory of Christ our Saviour. He cannot read it without a new throb of satisfaction and assurance.

This epistle was written to warn the Christians at Colosse against a heresy which was threatening to do a great injury to their church -- a human knowledge that would supplant the Word of God and turn the Gospel of Christ into a philosophy. There were two things in particular that those who embraced the heresy of Gnosticism pretended to know more about than the Word of God revealed, namely, the creation of the world and the origin of evil. According to the theory of the Gnostics, in creation matter had power inherent to build, and in evil matter had power inherent to destroy. Their philosophy was that if matter had a chance in creation it would develop into something better, and if it had a chance in life it would corrupt into something worse.

The people to whom our text was addressed, and those to whom it is now addressed, were those who had undergone an invaluable experience. First, they had been set free from the tyranny of Satan and sin. It is a glorious truth that "sin shall not have dominion over you." That is also God's intention for us. Secondly, they had passed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Thirdly, they had been redeemed or bought back. Fourthly, they had been forgiven of their sins. Therefore, in the light of these facts, it is not at all surprising that God wanted them to give Christ the first place in their lives.

I. Christ Was Pre-eminent In Creation.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." How simple, satisfying and sublime! "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3). The creator in Genesis was the Christ of the Gospels. In Colossians 1:16 Paul wrote: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." Christ was before creation. Not only did He precede all things, but He also created all things.

Some of the Colossians were confused in their thinking about the relation of God to the material world. They believed that up above was God and that He was inherently good. In that they were right. They believed that down here was matter and that it was inherently evil. In that they were wrong. But with those premises their problem was how to relate a good God to an evil world. They did it by filling all the intervening space with intermediate beings or spirits until the chain was long enough to bind the two together. To this Paul said, "No!" as he swept the whole fabric away at a single stroke. He told them that it was and is Christ who stands between. If you wonder how this universe came, it came by Him; how it is sustained, it is sustained by Him; why it was created, it was created for Him; where it is driving to, it is driving unto Him.

1. All creation was in Him - the power.
2. All creation was through Him - the promoter.
3. All creation was for Him - the purpose.
4. All creation consists or holds together in Him - the preserver.

II. Christ Is Pre-eminent In The Scriptures.

Christ fulfilled the prophecies of the prophets and was the explanation of the Epistles. The Old Testament said, "He is coming." The Gospels declare that "He came." The Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation tell us that "He is coming again." If Christ were taken out of the Scriptures, they would be messageless and meaningless.

When Philip met the eunuch who was reading the prophecy of Isaiah, in order to explain the passage which he was reading, he "began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). You can begin at any portion of the Bible and preach Christ. In every text of the Bible there is a road leading to Christ, and those who follow it far enough will come face to face with the Saviour, Who is pre-eminent in the Bible. Somebody might say to me, "You don't believe the Bible, do you?" My answer is "Yes, I do, because I am personally acquainted with the author." Anybody who knows the author believes what He has recorded in the Book.

III. Christ Is Pre-eminent In Salvation.

Paul asserted the supremacy of Christ in the realm of redemption in these words: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). At times each of us has been conscious of a spiritual chaos within his soul. There were black oceans of sin that no plummet of ours could sound, dark clouds of guilt that no hand of ours could

dissipate, wailing winds of remorse that no word of ours could silence and restless seas of passion that no voice of ours could subdue.

When the Christ of virgin birth and virtuous life offered Himself in vicarious death on the cross, He made salvation possible for every person who would receive Him as Saviour. By His sacrifice on the cross He changed the wailing or remorse into the music of hope for the race. He made a pathway through the grave and brought life and immortality to light through His gospel.

There is no salvation apart from Christ. Listen to His own words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The only salvation that anybody can have is through Christ.

IV. Christ Is Pre-eminent In The Church.

Of Christ Paul said, "And he is the head of the body, the church." The peerless Lord of creation is the spiritual head of the church. He is the cause of its origin, the bond of its unity, the source of its vitality and the controller of its activities. Because He is its head, the church can weather storm and stress, ridicule and rebuff, sarcasm and scorn, trouble and tribulation, critic and atheist. In spite of appalling indifference, frigid coldness, glaring human weaknesses, false criticism and bitter opposition to which His church is subjected, Christ is in her midst to strengthen us in our weak moments, to enlighten us in our gloom, to console us in our sorrow, to enhearten us in our defeats, to save the lost and to give inspiration for the tasks of Christians. Love for Christ will cause any member to be loyal to His church. One's relationship to Christ is indicated by his attitude toward His church.

V. Christ Must Be Pre-eminent In Our Lives.

Of what avail is it that Christ is pre-eminent in creation, the Scriptures, salvation and the church, if you and I do not give Him first place in our plans and lives? So many place such things as pleasure, business, the cares of life, home and friends before Christ. Some even render Christian service for honor from men, for the glory to be received and for the position it offers, instead of doing it out of love for Christ who deserves first place in their lives. He won the right to first place in our lives through love and He achieved it through sacrifice.

In his book, ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN DAYS, Charles Sheldon tells the story of a man who attended church once a Sunday, and that was all the religion his week had in it. His boys, seeing his hypocrisy, drifted into the saloon. His girls grew giddy, and flirted their way into society of the worst sort. Down at his office everything was wrong. Religion had never humanized his place of business. He had never learned that Christ intended to regulate life in all its parts and relationships. One Sunday afternoon he fell asleep and dreamed. He looked into the face of eternity, and was told that he had only seven more days to live, -- seven days in which to win back his boys; seven days in which to teach his daughters the things that are worthwhile; seven days in which to right his business and his relations with his fellows. But life for Robert Hardy during that week was real, for he saw things in their proper relationships and proportions, gave them their true evaluations, and exalted Christ to first place.

Christians may be divided into three classes -- those who give Christ place, those who give Him prominence and those who give Him the pre-eminence. Those who give Christ place admit Him because of the gifts He brings, without which they know they would be eternally impoverished. Such a religion is nothing but refined selfishness. Those who give Christ prominence engage in His service, but their lives are in reality self-controlled. Christ is merely a prominent figure among others in their existence. He is not the arbiter of their choices or the master of their lives. Those who give Christ the pre-eminence, yielding all they are and have to His rule, submitting everything to His direction, and seeking in all things only to add to His glory, are doubtless in the minority, but they are a minority of power and victory.

That which is pre-eminent in thought and affection exercises the strongest influence in the formation and development of character. This is seen when people make pleasure, ambition, success or money the pre-eminent thing in life, and devote to it their best thought and energy. A man's safety and highest welfare, as well as the honor of Christ, are determined by the place he assigns to Christ.

Does Christ have the first place in your life? Have you offered Him the throne or a footstool in your heart? Have you asked the pre-eminent Christ to take up His abode in the attic or the cellar, or have you offered Him the whole house? Let us give the peerless Christ His rightful place, which is that of pre-eminence, in each of our lives. Let us place Him first in our living, our giving, our witnessing and our hoping. Place Christ above self, family, friends, pleasure and business as God has purposed that we shall do. Let us adore Him, enthrone Him, and crown Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Will you give Christ the first place, which is His rightful one, in your life as now we sing the invitation song?