

Christ in Colossians

by A.B. Simpson

The book of Colossians reveals the preeminence of Christ in all things, emphasizing His role in the Trinity, creation, providence, truth, redemption, the life of believers, and their future hope.

Scripture: Colossians 1:17-18, Colossians 2:3, Colossians 2:6, Colossians 2:9-10, Colossians 3:1-4

Topics: "Living in Christ", "The Preeminence of Christ"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the centrality of Christ in the book of Colossians, portraying Him as the preeminent figure in all aspects of life, creation, providence, truth, redemption, and the believer's life. He illustrates that Christ is the fullness of God and the source of wisdom and knowledge, urging believers to set their affections on heavenly things. Simpson uses the analogy of an artist who strives to capture the essence of Christ, highlighting that true life in Christ transforms and elevates our existence. He calls for a deep, personal relationship with Jesus, asserting that our identity and actions should reflect His character. Ultimately, Simpson concludes with the hope of glory that believers have in Christ, who is our life and future hope.

Transcript

CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS

"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 preeminence" (Col. 1:18).

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3: 2).

Each of Paul's epistles has an expression peculiar to itself. The Thessalonian epistles are characterized by the advent tinge, and shine with the glory of the second coming. Ephesians is the epistle of the "heavenly places"; Philippians of the sweetness of the Christian temper; and Colossians is the portrait of Jesus, and its keynote is "Christ is all and in all."

It is said that the celebrated artist, Dannecker, was asked by Napoleon Bonaparte to paint a Venus for the Louvre, and declined. An almost fabulous price was then offered, and he still refused. The insulted emperor, astonished that any one should refuse money, and still more that he should refuse him, demanded why he declined. "I have painted Christ and I can never lower my brush to paint an inferior subject." And it had taken him half a lifetime to paint his picture of Christ. The first time he painted Him,

after eight years of labor, he asked his little daughter to look at it. Uncovering the canvas he brought her in. She clapped her hands together with an expression of intense surprise and admiration. "Who do you think it is?" he asked. "Oh," she said, "it is a great man." His countenance fell and he took his brush and daubed the picture into a perfect wreck. "I have failed. It is not Christ." He went to work again and toiled and prayed, and when he took the child in the next time there was not the same expression of wonder, delight and admiration, but the tears came and she stole softly up as though it were the real Christ, whispering, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Ah, it was Christ! The expression was there!

So there are lives that remind you of a great man, and there are others that reveal the vision of a living Savior; and they are messages that are not forgotten. All that remains is the memory of Jesus, and you feel somehow your heart burned within you as you got near the Master, and you are the better for it. Thus the epistle to the Colossians is the picture of Jesus. It reveals to us the heart of Christ.

1. Christ is all and in all in the Trinity. The epistle brings out His relation to the Father, for we read: "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." The Father is pleased to express Himself in the Son, to pour Himself into Christ and stand back while Christ fills the picture and reveals the Father. We do not directly see the Father, but we see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Again we read, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2: 9). He is the image of the invisible God, for God reveals Himself to us in Christ and He wants us to honor Him. Unitarianism, Deism and all "isms" that only make Jesus an exalted Man, or a superior being, dishonor the Father as much as the Son, for God has commanded us to render supreme worship to Him even as to the Father, for "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father," and he that hath rejected Him hath rejected the Father also. May we keep a high reverential estimate of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are living in an age when people think it is well just to love God, and they talk about the "spirit" of Christ, an ethical Christ, and other human Christs. We have heard recently of the Japanese Christ, a sort of evolution of their own national thought grafted on to Christianity. Then we have the socialistic Christ, and it all sounds very well, but it is direct blasphemy and rebellion against the dignity of Jesus and the authority of the Father. Whatever else we fail in let us be orthodox in our conception of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and honor, worship and glorify Him even as the Father, for "it pleased the Father that in his should all fulness dwell."

2. Christ is all in all in creation. "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 his, and for him." Christ is the Author and the End of creation. All the glory of nature is but the reflection of His own glory. The Father is revealed in the Son. The Son is revealed in the majesty of nature. The shining heavens and verdant earth are but the mirror of His attributes and the work of His hands.

They were made for Him as well as by Him. He is the final cause of creation. The lion with his lordship over the lower creation is but a type of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The gentle lamb was made to set forth the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The ancient rocks and everlasting mountains are but object lessons of the Rock of Ages. The flowers that blossom on the hillside and in the gardens breathe the sweetness of the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley. The radiant sun is but a figure of the Sun of Righteousness, and the glowing stars proclaim the glory of the Bright and Morning Star. The shepherd and his flock, the bridegroom and his joy, the vine with its hanging clusters, the streamlet with its flowing tide, the very bread we eat, all become an alphabet to spell out the greatness and the grace of Him by whom all earthly things were made and who is the real substance of which they are but the shadow. "I am the vine," He says, as though the earthly vine were but a figure created to set forth the true. Even creation will not be complete

until the Son of man shall become its recognized Lord and King, and the new creation shall rise as the fair inheritance of Jesus and His saints, and He that sitteth upon the throne shall say, "Behold, I make all things new." In His sublime vision, John pictures every creature that is in heaven and earth and in the sea, the whole universe joining to adore and worship "Him that sitteth upon the throne, and . . . the Lamb forever." Then creation shall have reached its goal and all things shall be for Him as well as through Him.

3. Christ is all and in all in the realm of providence. "For by him all things consist" (Col. 1: 17). Literally this is translated in the Revised Version, "All things hang together." He is the cohesive center and principle of nature and providence. He is the Lord and Ruler of universal government. He who by one creative act formed the universe, by continuous activity upholds and sustains it. Not a fluttering bird which sings in the branches, not an insect that floats upon the air, not a bud that bursts in the vernal spring, not a star which shines in the vast empyrean, but is constantly dependent on the activity of His hand. He who bears the universe upon His shoulder carries His loved ones on His heart, and with a more particular providence plans every instant and incident of their life and causes all things to work together for their good. It is the Lamb who looses the book of seven seals and unfolds every destiny for the individual and the universe. The ascended Christ is Head over all things for His Body, the Church, and while the ambitions and passions of man have their full sway in the evolving of human history, yet He rules or overrules in every event and forges every link into a chain of infinite wisdom, power and love, so that even the things that seem to hinder only help at last His ultimate design. The wrath of man is made to praise. The dark shadows of seeming calamity are but part of the picture of His life and love, and when all is finished, the saints of earth and the intelligences of heaven shall unite to say, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy."

4. Christ is all and in all in the realm of truth. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2: 3). The ordinances and ceremonial rites of the old dispensation were but shadows of which He is the substance (Col. 2: 17). The philosophies and speculations with which false teachers were seeking to dazzle and deceive their minds were but counterfeits of the truth of which Christ is the center and the sun. Instead of pursuing these elusive visions the Apostle bids them abide in Him and prays for them that "their hearts might be comforted . . . unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." This is the mystery of mysteries, the fount of wisdom, the sum of knowledge, to know God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. How little our scholarship and learning will avail in the light of the New Jerusalem! How the graduates will go down and the poor illiterate disciples will go up in the heavenly classes where the test of our standing will be our intimacy with Jesus!

5. Christ is all and in all in redemption; for the cross is the supreme glory of the Gospel and the end to which all revelation has been moving. Indeed, even nature is full of foreshadowings of redemption, some interposition by which wrong should be righted and the lower lifted to a higher life, even as the buried seed grows into the harvest and the chrysalis into the radiant butterfly. And so, early in this epistle we are brought into immediate contact with the great Redeemer "who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unproveable in his sight." Here

we find redemption reaching even farther than sinful men, for Christ hath reconciled all things both in earth and heaven. Perhaps even Gabriel himself is established more firmly in his high estate because the Son of man died to reconcile and redeem. At least we know that He has reconciled us and brought us nigh to God through His precious blood, and that forevermore He will be the first in the trust, the love and the praise of all the choirs of ransomed men who shall join to sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

6. Christ is all and in all the life of His people. For, in the first place our life all begins by receiving Him. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2: 6). It is not receiving a sacrament, a creed, a system of theology, a set of moral precepts, but a living, personal Savior. That is salvation. "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

Then further, the continuance and progress of our Christian life is just as simple and as personal. "So walk ye in him." It is a life of dependence and communion, step by step, receiving Him afresh as our all-sufficiency, our wisdom, strength and holiness. Still further, we are taught that we are complete in Him (Col. 2: 10). That is to say, He fills up every possible need of our life and being. For the deeper life of sanctification is simply Christ within. This is the mystery, he says, "which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery . . . which is Christ in you the hope of glory." This is so simple that it really cannot be made more plain. It is not a process of teaching, or even the formation of a character, but it is acquaintance with a Person, an intimate union and fellowship with Him so that He actually comes into our being and becomes the Source and Strength of our very life, reliving His own life in us, and we falling with perfect naturalness into His will, His plan, His steps, and all His perfect life. So deep and intimate is this union that a great variety of figures are introduced to express and illustrate its fuller meaning. We are "rooted in him" (2: 7). We are "built up in him" (2: 7). We are "buried with him" (2: 12). We are "dead with him to our sins" (2: 13). We are resurrected with him (3: 1). Our "life is hid with Christ in God" (3: 3). Nay, He Himself is our very life (3: 4).

And then when it comes to the question of conduct, our actions are to be determined by our relation to Him. It is because we are in Him that we are to act like Him. And so we read, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." To act in the name of Jesus is to act as if you were Jesus, to sustain His character, His dignity, and the life that would be expected from Him if He Himself were here. But it is our relation to Him that inspires our conduct. We need the powerful motive of His life and love, yes, and the actual force of His indwelling Spirit to enable us to live out His life in our daily conduct and conversation. How many of us are as consistent with our high calling as the simple Chinese servant in an Oakland family who applied for a situation in the family of a professing Christian? Poor John was subject to a pretty thorough examination about his habits, but gave satisfactory and unequivocal answers to all inquiries. "Do you drink?" he was asked. "No, me Christian. Me no drink." "Do you play cards?" "No, me Christian," and so on. He was soon at work in his new home and was found efficient and faithful in everything. But one night the family had a big party and John found himself called upon to wait upon them in the usual attendance at such a function. Faithfully and silently he went through the night without a murmur, and saw them playing cards, dancing and drinking wine. The next morning he presented himself to the mistress with a short and plain announcement, "Me go, me no stay." "Why John, what is the matter?" she asked. "Me no drink, me no play cards, me no stay with heathen who drink and play cards. Me go. Me Christian." To him there was no other logical alternative. If he was a Christian it meant to walk like Christ.

The consciousness of our high calling and our union with such a Master must lift us above the world and all its ways. It is said that the Dauphin of France, the poor orphan child of the murdered Louis XVI and his queen, was committed by his enemies to the care of a very brutal and wicked man who was to teach him only that which was evil. The poor lad had to look and listen to nothing but that which was degrading and wrong, but often he would say when tempted to stoop to the level of his companions, "I cannot say, I cannot do such things. I was born to be a king!" Yes, there was an impulse and a memory of higher things, and it kept him above the low and the base. The love of Christ, the life of Christ, the higher spiritual consciousness which His presence gives must lift us to the place of holiness and lead us to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.

7. Christ is all and in all in our future hope. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3: 4). Christ in you is the hope of glory, and when that glory comes it will be all Christ, His presence, His fellowship, His likeness, we shall be like Him, we shall be with Him. The Lamb is all the glory in Emanuel's land. Such is an imperfect outline of the Christ picture of Colossians. God help us to reproduce it in our lives.

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