

The Beauty of Christ

In 1893, Chicago hosted an international gathering called the *World's Columbian Exposition*. Twenty-one million people visited the various exhibits; a remarkable feat considering the automobile had not been invented. It was a magnificent exposition that reflected the height of human ingenuity and creativity.

One of the exposition exhibits was titled the World Parliament of Religions. Representatives from many of the world's religions were present to share the best points of their religion. The human hope was that a new syncretistic religion would emerge.

D. L. Moody, the great Chicago-based evangelist, was urged by his friends to condemn the World Parliament of Religions. Moody responded by saying, "I am going to make Christ so attractive that people will turn to Him."

Moody understood what many of us living in a multi-cultural, multi-religion world do not grasp; *when we throw mud, we lose ground and we get dirty*. The Apostle Peter urges, "*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect*" (1 Peter 3:15).

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Colossian Christian, took the same approach. He was writing to Christians who were being influenced by false religions. Instead of condemning the false religions, Paul, inspired by God's Spirit, penned a convincing defense of the peerless, pre-eminent, supreme and all-sufficient Christ. "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn 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 firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy*" (Col. 1:15-18).

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. "*No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known*" (John 1:18). Jesus Christ is the image, the exact representation of God. In Jesus Christ, we have the portrait of the invisible God become flesh. Christ in His person and character is the exact impression of God. "*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, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being...*" (Heb. 1:1-3).

Jesus Christ is the Lord over creation. Christ is preeminent in the creation. Paul states four truths regarding Christ's supremacy. First, Christ is the "firstborn over all creation." By firstborn, Paul does not mean that Christ was a created being. This was a hotly debated issue in the early church. Several early church councils debated whether Christ in His being was similar to God or the same substance of God in His being. Thus, we have the Nicene and the Chalcedonian Creeds that declare the eternal nature of Christ.

By firstborn, Paul was employing a common term of the day. Christ is first in rank and honor in His creation. In fact, the word firstborn was an Old Testament word for the Messiah to come. "*I will also appoint Him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth*" (Ps. 89:27). The Scriptures clearly declare, as Christ himself confirms, that He is the eternal, preeminent One in His creation.

Second, Christ is the Creator. "*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*" (Col. 1:16). Christ was the craftsman at the Father's side in creating all things out of nothing.

Third, Christ is not only the Creator but He is the goal of His creation. All things were created by Him and for Him. He is the organizing principle of all creation and history. Time and history will culminate in His second coming. Life has no eternal meaning and purpose without Him.

Fourth, Christ is supreme in His creation in that He sustains all things. "*He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*" (Col. 1:17). He holds all things together. "*And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church*" (Eph. 1:22). Christ sustains all things by His powerful word. "*The Son is the*

radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word..." (Heb. 1:3).

Such an exalted view of Christ not only protects us from heresy but also compels us to live for His glory. Paul culminates his defense of Christ by declaring, *"And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy"* (Col. 1:18).

Christ is supreme in all things. Authentic Christianity is a relationship with the One who is the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all things. He is the peerless and preeminent One. If our religion has become dull and boring, it may be because we have settled for religious projects rather than a relationship with the all-satisfying and all-sufficient Christ. Christianity in its essence is not a religion, list of rules or a philosophy of life. It is not a good choice of ancient or contemporary lifestyles. It is a relationship with the Supreme Being of the universe.

Life is like a solar system. There is something at the center, which defines and directs everything else that moves. What the physical sun is to our solar system, Christ is to our existence. He is the One who is to define and direct how we think, live and have our being. Tragically, many of us relegate Him to the periphery and put other pursuits and people at the center of our own personal solar system. We then wonder why our spiritual joy and life have diminished.

Christ-followers are called to have Christ as the central reality that defines who we are and directs how we think and live. Paul reminds us of the nature of this cosmic Christ who loves us so that we can live under His glorious lordship. *"And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy"* (Col. 1:18).