

Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians

Chapter Four

The Sovereignty of Jesus in His Present Kingdom of Light

“¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son: ¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins: ¹⁵ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: ¹⁶ 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: ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell” (Colossians 1:12-19).

Paul writes with some very vivid Jewish imagery (v 12). There are certain words in the text that are *key words* to that imagery such as “inheritance” and “saints in light.” The word “inheritance” refers to something ASSIGNED or ALLOTTED. To the twelve tribes of Israel it immediately drew their attention to the Land of Promise. To the Jew it meant a KINGDOM for them.

However, the “kingdom” Paul refers to in this imagery is the “kingdom” “in light;” the realm of ABSOLUTE TRUTH (“saints in light,” v 12). This “kingdom” is the realm of God’s sovereignty, glory and grace. It is the realm where Truth reigns supreme and where the Living Word of God is Lord.

This “kingdom” “of light” is the heavenly presence of God that fills the universe. It extends to the uttermost parts of the universe in both the macro and micro sense. The “kingdom” “of light” is another dimension of existence that transcends time and space, yet our time and space are a part of that existence. Although this other existence is beyond our human senses (I Corinthians 2:9), all believers are intended to live in this reality as we yield to the Holy Spirit and are empowered to live in obedience to God’s revealed will (Truth) through the Word of God. This is the realm where Jesus is Lord.

All believers have been qualified to live in this realm by the finished work of Christ and enabled to succeed in this realm by the enabling grace of God through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in their life. We must be careful to emphasize that this realm of “light” that Christ has qualified the believer to live in is a SPIRITUAL REALM. We can participate in it only when we are fully surrendered to the Spirit of God in us (Romans 6:11-13). Only the Holy Spirit can live God’s Truth through us. We cannot succeed in this spiritual existence apart from the enabling of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. This is what the words “made meet” in Colossians 1:12 refer to.

When the Word of God uses the word “saints,” it refers to individuals “born again” of the Spirit of God who have been set apart from this world and have become part of this heavenly existence. “Saints” refers to beings fit to live in the presence of God. Every Christian should understand that we live in this existence NOW. It is not a *Pie in the Sky* thing. It is our present reality. That truth ought to change the way we think and live in this world.

“¹⁷ Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. ¹⁸ (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is* their belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things.) ²⁰ For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹ Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:17-21).

The word “conversation” in Philippians 3:20 is from the Greek word *politeuma* (pol-it’-yoo-mah). It refers to a citizenship in a commonwealth govern and administrated by laws (in this case, the Laws of

God). This is the believer's present reality of existence.

Second imagery, THE CONQUERING DELIVERER (v 13); for the apostate Jew, salvation came by PLEASING God through works. For the pagan, salvation came by APPEASING their god(s); self-flagellation, human sacrifices, etc. In the Hellenization of Judaism, these two ideas became merged.

To the Christian, salvation came wrapped in a package and offered as a gift to be received by faith. To the early Christians, allowing ANYTHING to pervert the gospel of a FINISHED WORK offered as a GIFT was a crime that disqualified them from participating in the "kingdom" of "light" (the Truth of God's Word). The gospel is the *key* to that Kingdom.

¹³ When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? ¹⁴ And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. ¹⁵ He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? ¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter {*Petros*; pet'-ros - little stone}, and upon this rock {*petra*; pet'-ra - large rock or cliff; the city carved from a rock cliff was known as Petra} I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:13-19).

These truths were a direct contradiction to the Gnosticism perverting early Christianity. Gnosticism taught that salvation was a through a process of enlightenment to levels of spiritual knowledge (the 'stairway' to heaven heresy). A person was not GIVEN salvation. A person ACHIEVED salvation.

According to Colossians 1:14 ("In whom we have redemption"), the Fathers work is complete. The Father has ONCE FOR ALL; qualified, rescued and transferred the believer into His "kingdom . . . of light." Delivery from the TYRANNY of DARKNESS is a COMPLETELY FINISHED work of God and part of the believer's present reality. .Nothing can be added, or needs to be added, to what the Father has done. "In Christ" we have (presently possess) redemption "through His Blood," i.e., it was a costly liberation.

"Forgiveness" (Colossians 1:14) is not overlooking the problem of sin. Forgiveness is available because the penalty (judgment, Rom. 6:23a) for the sin has already been paid. Forgiveness is a benefit of salvation, not that which procures it. The word "forgiveness" in Colossians 1:14 is from the Greek word *aphesis* (af'-es-is), which means to release from bondage or imprisonment; to remit the penalty.

"Forgiveness" is the by-product of redemption (the "wages" of sin being paid). Therefore forgiveness is the remission of a deserved penalty because that penalty has been already substitutionally paid in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "Forgiveness" is not just God treating the believer like sin never happened. Forgiveness is not painting over our sin like we would paint over a dirty word on the wall, but rather it removing any evidence that the sin was ever there. It may have been there at one time but now it is completely gone.

In Colossians 1:15-19 we now move away from what Christ has done to WHO HE IS. In verse 19 "fullness" refers to all that God is or possesses residing in Jesus Christ. This refers especially to His sovereignty, authority and Lordship. These verses portray the SOVEREIGN POSITION of Jesus over all of reality in all of existences. The focal statement is in verse 18; "That in EVERYTHING He might have pre-eminence."

All worship of God MUST center around Jesus and His work. It is not enough to intellectually recognize that Jesus excels and is sovereignly above all others, whether gods or kings. We must personally give Him PRE-EMINENCE in our lives. The purpose of this statement is to expand upon the Person Who Jesus is. He is more than merely the Fathers angelic agent in the work of redemption as the Gnostics believed. He is God's agent in the WHOLE OF ALL GOD'S WORK, from creation to the consummation of history.

⁵ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; ¹¹ And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).

The Father plans, the Son executes that plan, and the Spirit is the power of execution. The Lordship of Jesus in Colossians 1:15-19 is TWOFOLD.

1. He is the Lord of creation (v.15-17).
2. He is the Lord of the New Creation (the church; v.18-19).

CHRIST’S SOVEREIGNTY is described. In Colossians 1:15 He is described as “the image of the invisible God.” “Image” is not just a reflection of likeness. If you were able to take a photograph of the “invisible God” the image that would be seen would be Jesus Christ, with all His attributes and spiritual characteristics. In other words, Jesus is God.

“He that hath seen me {Jesus} has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

In Colossians 1:18, Jesus is also referred to as “the firstborn of all creation.” This does not refer to Jesus being the first to be created. “Firstborn” is a Hebraism; a Hebrew phrase, idiom, or custom which can only be understood by understanding the idiom or custom. Being the “firstborn” was a POSITION OF PRIORITY. Therefore the “firstborn” was usually the oldest in the family and resultantly held the patriarchal position of priority (“preeminence,” Col. 1:18).

²⁷ Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. ²⁸ My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. ²⁹ His seed also will I make *to endure* for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven” (Psalm 89:27-29).

Therefore Christ Jesus possesses this position as the “last Adam” (I Cor. 15:45) and as the new Federal Head of the New Creation on the basis that He is the “image of God,” or in essence is God. The first Adam was created in the “image of God,” but that image was defaced in his fall into the corruption of sin.

Since no one of His creation is older than the Creator, He holds the first patriarchal position of priority (v.16.). He became part of His creation by being born as a baby. “Image” refers to Jesus being a physical revelation of the “invisible God.” Again, this would be a complete contradiction against the teachings of Gnosticism that taught the spiritual can never exist together with the material.

“Firstborn” refers too and amplifies the fact that even though Jesus had a physical birth he is ETERNALLY PRE-EXISTENT. According to Colossians 1:17, the material creation was not only brought into existence by Jesus, but the material world was also completely dependant upon Him for its continuing existence (“by him all things consist”).

THE SCOPE OF CREATION, v 16; “all things,” (universally; material and spiritual) Jesus is Lord of it all. “Whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers,” He is Lord of ALL. “In heaven” He is Lord of the angels. In earth” He is Lord (Sovereign) over men, animals and the natural laws of physics. He is Lord of the “visible” things we can see. He is Lord of the “invisible,” things we cannot see such as angels and the souls of men.

The Colossian Church was under attack by this philosophy of the Gnostics. The Gnostics believed in angel worship; i.e., that there were various levels of angelic beings which filled the gap between God and man (the spiritual and material worlds). They also believed that they were dependant upon these angels as a media of communion with God. This later developed into praying to *saints* in Catholicism (the angels were replaced by *saints*). This heresy is no less wrong, only more acceptable. Paul immediately eradicated all these mediators between the spiritual world and the physical (material) world and points them to the one Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:18-19; THE LORD OF THE NEW CREATION (His Body, the Church).

In Colossians 1:15-17 the emphasis is on His ETERNAL BEING. In Colossians 1:18-19, the emphasis turns to the present resurrected glory of the incarnate One. Jesus is Lord of the Church (the “first fruits” of the New Creation). The “church” is made up of all people who have put their faith in the FINISHED WORK of Christ for their salvation (both living and dead). They have already been “born again” into this “kingdom . . . of light.” The word “church” refers here to the future resurrected and glorified body of believers which will rule and reign with Christ during His one-thousand year reign on earth. However, the “kingdom . . . of light” is their present reality of existence along with this material world.

Jesus is “the beginning” (Col.1:18) of this New Creation. The emphasis of this text is not on the “church,” but on the regeneration to this NEW LIFE (existence); the RE-CREATION. Jesus is the beginning of the New Creation as the now eternal God\man.

“Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Corinthians 5:17).

Jesus is the “firstborn out from among the dead” into this New Creation. What man sees as an end, God sees as a beginning.

“⁵¹ Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? ⁵⁶ The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:51-57).

It would be of little value to be Lord of a DEAD CREATION, so Jesus died so we could become part of His New Creation. “All things” refers to both the spiritual and material universe including the “church.” The words “might have pre-eminence” means Jesus is made first, sovereign, and LORD. This happens in this present worldly existence when individual believers making personal choices. That is what the word “might” means.

Today, He does not force his Lordship on a world that does not want Him or that refuses to yield to His will. If He is Lord of your universe, it is because you have ALLOWED Him to be Lord there. He has qualified you to participate in His realm, have you ALLOWED Him to be the One and only Lord of yours?

The Sovereignty of Jesus in His Present Kingdom of Light

1. What does the word “inheritance” (Colossians 1:12) refer to regarding the Church? _____

2. What kind of a realm is the “kingdom” of Christ presently? _____

3. From Colossians 1:13 what is the second imagery Paul is conveying? _____
4. What is the *key* that opens the door of salvation and allows the believer participation in the Kingdom of the Spirit of truth? _____
5. What is the significance of Colossians 1:14)? _____

6. What position does Christ presently occupy according to Colossians 1:15-19 (what resides in Him)? _____

7. What is the twofold Lordship of Jesus?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
8. Discuss the meaning of “the image of the invisible God.” How can you have an image of something invisible? _____

9. What does the Hebraism “firstborn” mean regarding to Jesus Christ? _____

10. What is the purpose of the statement of Colossians 1:16-17 regarding the influence of the Gnostics at Colosse? _____

- How does this relevant to today? _____

11. In Colossians 1: 18-19 Jesus is portrayed as the Lord of the New Creation. What is the Biblical term for the group of people that presently make up the New Creation? _____

12. What does it mean when verse 18 says Jesus is “the beginning”? _____
