



SUNDAY SCHOOL JULY 20, 2025

Prayer:

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New Testament

Colossians 1:15-20

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

(Paul Writing to the Colossians)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers ... all things have been created through him and for him.

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the *firstborn* from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

OVERVIEW

Colossians 1:15–20 is one of the most theologically rich and poetic passages in the New Testament. Often called the **Christ Hymn**, it presents a high Christology, asserting Jesus' supremacy over all creation and His central role in cosmic reconciliation. It elevates Christ as both **Creator** and **Redeemer**, affirming His divine nature and purpose within the Church and the world.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Authorship & Purpose:** The Apostle Paul, writing from prison (likely in Rome or Ephesus), addresses the Colossian church to **correct false teachings** that diminished Christ's divinity or made Him one among many spiritual beings.
- **Audience:** Early Christians in Colossae—a small town in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey)—**influenced by Greek philosophy, Judaism, and local mysticism.**
- **Placement in the Letter:** This hymn follows Paul's opening thanksgiving and prayer (1:3–14) and leads into his explanation of Christ's reconciling work for humanity (1:21–23).
- **Theological Focus:** The passage centers on Christ's:
 - Supremacy over **creation**
 - Headship over the **Church**
 - Role in **reconciliation**
 - Full embodiment of **God's presence**

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Greco-Roman World:** In Paul's day, various mystery religions and philosophies promoted hierarchies of spiritual beings (angels, *emanations, demiurges – See Addendum*) between God and the material world. Some in Colossae may have begun viewing Jesus as a lesser spiritual mediator.
- **Jewish Influence:** Jewish traditions often focused on strict adherence to laws, rituals, and angelic mediators, which could have led to *downplaying Jesus' sufficiency – See Addendum.*
- **Political Implications:** In Roman culture, Caesar was called "*Lord*" and "*Savior*." Paul's declaration that **Jesus is the true image of the invisible God and head over all powers** was not just religious, but politically subversive.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Date Written:** Approximately 60–62 AD.
- **Timeframe of Events Referenced:**
 - **Creation:** “All things were created through Him and for Him.”
 - **Incarnation and Cross:** Christ’s bodily presence and death.
 - **Cosmic Reconciliation:** A forward-looking eschatological vision of peace through the cross.
- **Church Context:** Written within a few decades of Jesus’ death and resurrection—still a formative time for Christian theology.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Scholars see this passage as a **cosmic creed** that presents Christ as the **glue** of all existence—not only the Church’s savior but the sustainer of the entire universe.

Metaphorically, Christ is the **blueprint, foundation, and cornerstone** of all creation. Just as rural Indiana communities are held together by shared values, weathered churches, and familiar rhythms of life, Paul is declaring that the *entire cosmos* holds together because of Christ.

In a Grant County context:

- **“Firstborn of all creation”** reminds us that Christ is *not* merely first in time, but *first in rank*—preeminent over all social structures, local governments, school boards, and even cultural divisions in a rural county.
 - This is why we teach our children what Jesus taught, so they can be examples at our schools.
 - This is why government and school officials need to live Jesus’s *teachings*, so we are being led by those with integrity, love and truthfulness.
- **“All things hold together in Him”** can serve as a way to relieve pain in divided times. Whether disputes are over politics, worship style, or economic hardship, this passage affirms that Jesus is the *source of unity and cohesion*.
- For those who feel **small** in a rural Midwestern county, Paul’s cosmic vision brings dignity: your town, your church, your life—**all matter to God** and are upheld by Christ.

SUMMARY

Colossians 1:15–20 is a powerful declaration of Jesus Christ’s identity as the divine image of God, the Creator of all things, the head of the Church, and the agent of cosmic reconciliation. Paul uses exalted language—possibly from an early Christian hymn—to stress that Jesus is supreme over both the spiritual and physical realms. This counters local heresies and affirms that Jesus is not one among many powers but **the one in whom all things find their origin, purpose, and peace**. For the Colossians—and for us today—this passage is a reminder that Christ is central not only to personal faith but to the entire order of the universe.



Gospel

Luke 10:38-42

JESUS VISITS MARTHA AND MARY

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying.

But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me."

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

OVERVIEW

Luke 10:38–42 presents a brief but profound encounter in which **Jesus visits the home of two sisters, Martha and Mary**. While Martha busies herself with the preparations of hospitality, Mary sits at Jesus' feet, listening to His teaching. When Martha expresses frustration, Jesus gently affirms Mary's choice, saying she has chosen "the better part."

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

This story is located shortly after the **Parable of the Good Samaritan** (Luke 10:25–37), which emphasizes **active love** and service. In contrast, this passage stresses **attentive presence** and **spiritual receptivity**. Together, these passages form a balance: one cannot just "do" for God, but must also "be" with God.

Mary sitting at Jesus' feet echoes the posture of a **disciple** (cf. Acts 22:3), which is significant because, in first-century Jewish society, **women were rarely afforded the role of a student of a rabbi**. This moment **subtly but powerfully underscores Jesus' inclusivity in discipleship**.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

In first-century Palestine:

- **Hospitality was a sacred duty**, especially toward rabbis or traveling teachers. Martha's actions align with these cultural expectations.
- Women were expected to remain in the background, handling domestic duties. Mary's behavior could have been considered culturally inappropriate.
- Jesus, by not correcting Mary and instead praising her choice, **challenges the gender norms** of His day.
- This encounter also reveals a broader critique of societal pressures—**the busyness and distraction of cultural expectations**—against the simplicity of spiritual attentiveness.

This story fits into the broader Lukan theme of lifting the marginalized, especially women, the poor, and outsiders, and centering them in the Kingdom narrative.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- This event likely took place **around 30–33 CE**, during the later stages of Jesus' public ministry as He moved toward Jerusalem.
- It falls within the section of Luke's Gospel (chapters 9–19) often referred to as the **Travel Narrative**, when Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to fulfill His mission.



SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphorically, Martha and Mary represent **two dimensions of the Christian life**:

- **Martha**: Action, service, performance, the burden of responsibility.
- **Mary**: Presence, contemplation, learning, relational intimacy.

Many scholars suggest this story is not about **devaluing service**, but rather about **prioritizing spiritual attentiveness**—especially in a world that praises **busyness as a virtue**.

In **modern-day Grant County, Indiana**, where traditional values and strong work ethic often define identity, this passage could speak directly to those in church leadership, farming families, educators, or caregivers who feel the **weight of “doing” for others**. Martha’s mindset might resonate with church volunteers who serve tirelessly, but who may feel unseen or spiritually dry.

This text offers **permission to pause** ... to sit, to listen, and to learn without guilt. For rural communities that emphasize productivity, the passage may serve as a call to **reclaim the inner life** and not lose sight of **why** we serve in the first place.

It also addresses modern **gender expectations**, affirming the spiritual agency of women in leadership and discipleship roles. Mary’s example could be a way to elevate women's roles in rural churches where traditional gender norms are still strongly held.

SUMMARY

Luke 10:38–42 recounts a brief but powerful visit between Jesus and two sisters, Martha and Mary. While Martha is overwhelmed by the duties of hospitality, Mary chooses to sit and listen to Jesus. When Martha seeks help, Jesus gently affirms Mary’s choice, highlighting the **importance of spiritual focus over cultural obligation**. The story invites readers to balance service and contemplation and serves as a challenge to cultural and gender expectations—both then and now. For Grant County and similar rural areas, it reminds us that **God values our presence more than our performance**, and that **stillness and learning are just as holy as action and duty**.



Addendum

What are Emanations and Demiurges?

These terms come from ancient philosophical and religious systems that help shed light on what early Christians were up against, especially in places like Colossae.

Emanations

- **Definition:** Emanations are **spiritual “extensions” or “radiations”** from a divine source—like light rays from the sun. In **Gnostic** and **Neoplatonic** thought, the Supreme God was considered too pure or perfect to directly interact with the physical world, so a series of increasingly “lesser” divine beings were thought to *emanate* from Him, forming a kind of cosmic hierarchy.
- **Relevance to Colossians:** This belief implied that Jesus might just be *one of many* intermediary beings—not **fully divine** or central. Paul’s response in Colossians 1:15–20 directly refutes this: Christ is not an emanation—**He is the image of the invisible God and through Him all things were created.**

Demiurge

- **Definition:** The **demiurge** (craftsman) is a being from **Gnostic philosophy** who is seen as the **creator of the material world**—but *not* the highest God. In some systems, the demiurge is even considered **ignorant or evil**, having created a flawed, material world far from the perfection of the spiritual realm.
- **Relevance to Christianity:** Early Christians rejected the idea that the material world was evil or that it was created by some flawed spiritual being. Paul makes it clear in Colossians that **Jesus Himself is the Creator, and the material world is not something to escape from—but something being reconciled and renewed through Christ.**

What does “downplaying Jesus’ sufficiency” mean?

It means some in the Colossian church were starting to believe that **faith in Jesus alone wasn’t enough**—that you needed **something more** to be fully saved, fully spiritual, or fully connected to God.

Here’s what that might have looked like:

Examples from Colossae (and beyond):

1. **Spiritual Mediators** might say:

“Jesus is good, but to really get close to God, you also need to connect with angels or other spiritual beings.”

Paul counters this in Colossians 2:18 by warning against **“worship of angels”** and says **Christ is the head over every power and authority.**

2. **Legalism & Rituals** Believers might say:

“Belief in Jesus is fine, but you also need to follow strict food laws, celebrate certain religious festivals, or observe Sabbath rules.”

Paul argues against this in Colossians 2:16–17: **“These are a shadow of the things to come; the reality is found in Christ.”**



3. Mystical or Secret Knowledge (Gnosticism) Followers might say:

"You're not really saved unless you have access to hidden wisdom, visions, or elevated knowledge."

Paul counters by saying that **all the fullness of God dwells in Christ** (Col. 1:19), and **you have been given fullness in Him** (Col. 2:10).

In Plain Terms:

To say Jesus is "sufficient" means:

- You don't need **extra rituals, extra rules, or extra revelations**.
- Jesus is **enough**—for salvation, for understanding God, and for living a full spiritual life.

In Grant County Terms:

Imagine someone saying: *"Faith in Jesus is a good start, but you also need to follow this checklist, attend this exact kind of church, or be part of a special group."*

Paul would say: *"No. Jesus is **not just step one**—He's the **whole ladder**. Everything you need to be reconciled with God and transformed in this life is found **in Him alone**."*

Gnosticism & Colossians

Though **full-blown Gnosticism** hadn't fully developed by Paul's time (~60 AD), many of its **early ideas** were already **circulating**, especially in places like Colossae, where Greek philosophy, mystery religions, and Judaism blended together.

Core Gnostic Ideas That May Have Influenced Colossae:

1. **Matter is evil; spirit is good** – Gnostics believed the material world was corrupt, created by a lesser god (demiurge), and that salvation meant escaping the body.
2. **Secret knowledge ("gnosis") saves you** – Only those with special spiritual insight could truly know God and be redeemed.
3. **Christ was a spiritual being** – Some Gnostics denied Jesus had a real body. They taught He only "seemed" human (a view called *Docetism*).

How Paul Pushes Back in Colossians:

Gnostic Idea	Paul's Response in Colossians
Matter is bad	"By Him all things were created" (1:16) — creation is good and made by Christ.
Spirit only matters	"He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (1:17) — Jesus unites body and spirit.
Jesus wasn't fully human	"God was pleased to dwell in Him" (1:19), and He made peace "through His blood, shed on the cross" (1:20).
Secret knowledge saves	"In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3) — no extra revelations needed.



Judging Vs. Joy

Jesus' words to Martha are **not a scolding**, but a **gentle redirection**.

"Do not judge Mary for not doing what you're doing"

- Jesus is essentially saying: *"Martha, you're worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is necessary."*
- That isn't just about housework—it's about **expectations**, especially the **expectation that others must value and respond to things the same way we do**.
- Martha might have believed that her way of honoring Jesus (through service) was the *right* or *only* way, and thus judged Mary as being irresponsible or lazy.

This can be interpreted that Jesus is gently cautioning against **judging others' spiritual posture** when it differs from our own. Mary's way wasn't wrong—it was just different, and deeply meaningful.

"Find joy in what you're doing"

- **Martha's distraction robbed her of the joy of serving.**
- Jesus doesn't say service is bad—He just points out that Martha is **"worried and distracted"** by it.
- In other words: *If your service leaves you anxious, bitter, or resentful, something's off. It's okay to serve, but do it from a place of love, not burden.*

This is a helpful message in **church life**, **community work**, and even **family dynamics**:

Don't lose the joy of your offering because you're too focused on how others are or aren't contributing.

For Grant County or Small-Community Application:

In places where everyone knows each other and "pulling your weight" is highly valued, this story can **challenge the impulse to judge those who serve differently—or more quietly**.

Sometimes the **Marys of the world** are seen as *not doing enough*, when in truth, they are doing a **deeper kind of work**—reflection, prayer, presence—that's not as visible but just as vital.