

Last week we looked at the way that God has made us fit to share of what He has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light? We examined this particular verse (v12). *He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, 14 by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.* We noted that rather than discuss what God has done for us from the perspective of grace as he does in the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul looks at it from the perspective of Christ. Our salvation is in Christ – we enter His kingdom only because we have been freed from the powers of darkness; our sins have been forgiven.

It focuses on His finished work, not to illustrate grace, but to emphasise the person and authority of Christ. This was necessary because it appears (from the way Paul argues his case), that the Colossians were faced with Jewish thought on one side that saw Jesus as a man, and Platonic thought (possibly an early form of gnosticism) that suggested that Jesus was nothing more than a very powerful being, the Demiurge, who was responsible for creating the world because matter was too base a commodity for a transcendent God to have done so.

In describing Christ, Paul established both His deity and His authority both over creation and of the church. We looked at His authority over creation last week, leaving the church for this week.

For the benefit of those who weren't here last Sunday, I emphasised that all the phrases in this particular passage from 15 to 20 must be taken as a block as they have a set of intertwined ideas that help interpret and explain one another. We see that if we take them in isolation, they have been used to support heresies that deny the deity of Christ – which are the exact opposite of Paul's intention.

In the first block of verses about creation from vv14-17 we found that Paul emphasises that Jesus is the incomparable Christ. He's not a created being or afterthought. He is the visible likeness of the invisible God, all things were created by Him and for Him. For anyone who struggles with the deity of Christ, these verses are very clear. He wasn't created, He created everything. He's not just our Saviour, our Lord, but He's our Creator. He's central to creation because it's His and He sustains it – and we haven't even got to the redeemer bit yet.

The second thing Paul wants to bring us about the incomparable Christ is His authority over the Church. The centrality of Jesus to our faith isn't just because He is Creator, but that He is Redeemer. When Jesus finished His work, He added something new – a new relationship between God and His fallen creation – us. That's why we refer to a new covenant. *2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!* The Jews prided themselves in the covenant God had made with them, but it has been upgraded, made complete in Christ. Salvation isn't just of the Jews, but specifically of one Jew, Jesus. Therefore what's come out of the work of Christ is a new people – the Church.

We know from this letter and others, that there was this Judaizing element which wanted people to take on all the trappings of Jewish law. That just wasn't necessary, it's been upgraded, superseded, made perfect in Christ. That's why Paul emphasises the church

here.

So what does he say about it? Let's do the phrases again and understand them via their interconnections. We see straight away that they mirror many of the thoughts in relation to the creation.

***He is the head of his body, the church;***

*And he is the head of the body, the church;*

Different translations put the punctuation in different places so bear that in mind for comparison. Note first that the church is His body. Paul is very specific throughout about the authority of Christ in relation to the church even more than he was about His authority over creation. This is important when we look at the centrality of Christ.

One of the great features of Western Christianity (the Christianity that developed from the RC perspective, which includes most Protestantism) is its tendency to turn the Trinity into a hierarchy. It often expresses itself in a strong emphasis on the Father. We don't have time to explore the co-equality of the Persons of the Trinity this evening suffice to say that Trinity isn't hierarchy. What we do learn from this whole passage is that the Son has specific authority over creation (last week) and over His church because creation was made through Him and for Him (last week) and He is responsible for the redemption of that which fell – us!

So He is the head of His body, the church. We have often looked at the body in terms of us. Let's look at the head in terms of Jesus. What does the head do? In essence, in the human sense, what is us is in our heads. In a straight biological sense, our bodies have no life without a head because it makes the rest operation. But what really makes our intelligence, gives us thought, gives us a sense of being is in our heads.

Spiritually, the only reason the Church has life is because Jesus gives it that life. On a local basis, never see the church outside the context of Christ. It isn't just a question of authority; we can't function without Him.

***He is the source of the body's life.***

*he is the beginning*

The next phrase translates slightly differently between the two translations we tend to use. The GN tends to go for the kind of idea that I just suggested by continuing the idea of the head being the source of life. The NIV links it to the the first-born and puts it with that sentence. Remember, there were no small letters or any punctuation in NT Greek! Either way, it emphasises the fact that the Church had a beginning, an origin. Creation had an origin, so does new creation in relation to the church. It originates and has existence in Christ – and nothing else. Nothing or no-one else on earth can claim to be the church. Paul develops this further in the next point.

***He is the first-born Son, who was raised from death, in order that he alone might have the first place in all things.***

*and the first-born from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*

He is the first-born Son – the first-born from amongst the dead. It's this phrase that helps us understand the first-born over all creation. We saw last week how the JW's use this to show Jesus was the first created being. But first-born could also mean one who has been given equal authority with the ruler. Jesus is the first-born from among the dead.

But He wasn't the first one to be raised from the dead. But He is the one who has conquered death and has authority over it. So He has first place in all things. Why? Because if you can control death and live, you have complete control over everything. Why? Because He's God.

Likewise the JWs twist this one around to suit themselves. So how can we be sure this is all about the deity of Christ? Because we are bothered to read this in the round and go to the next sentence!

***For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, NRSV - For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell***

The literal translation for this is YLT *because in him it did please all the fullness to tabernacle*. However, I found that translators gave different angles to this particular phrase as it is rather brief. To get the idea of it we need to go to chapter 2:9 which says *For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*. For me that makes the meaning clear. Christ is everything that God is. The word is fullness. He's fully God in every respect – human yes, God yes.

***Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. through him to reconcile to himself all things***

We see here that reflection of creation – he was responsible for creation, now He's responsible for it's restoration. The use by the GNB of the universe is not quite right I think. The Greek *panta* really means all things. What's wrong with creation is that humans fell and although we can damage creation, the true damage was in the broken relationship between the human race and God. That's why Paul uses reconcile here. We can't use reconciliation in terms of inanimate creation, but we can in terms of broken relationships. The process of reconciliation is described in the next verse.

***God made peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven. whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.***

And of course that reconciliation, that state of peace between people and God were made through the shedding of Jesus' blood. Significantly, Paul stays with the whole concept of deity by referring to the Son's blood. The whole idea here is that Jesus was not a created being that was being a substitute for us, but that the Son Himself was. These ideas are more fully explored in other parts both of this letter and the NT, this passage is just a taster – the introduction as it were.

This passage is one of the foundational passages of the NT. It shows that Christ was not a created being, whether godlike or human, but someone who was fully God in every respect. For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. It is the foundation of our faith. How can God be transcendent and human at the same time? This is the foundation of Trinitarian philosophy. It's what makes the Christian faith distinctive over Unitarianism, JWs or Islam.

Jesus in God, He is our God. He is the One that has the ultimate authority in the Church

and in creation. It is in His name we stand. It is in His name we pray. Never be afraid to utter the name of Jesus in worship, in prayer, in situations where you need help, in situations where you think the devil is getting at you. It is the name of authority in the universe and in heaven.

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