

Preaching the Uniqueness of Christ Today #2

1. Introduction.

- a. We continue: Biblical exposition → doctrinal/theological understanding/faithfulness. Need in every day, but especially our own (=given biblical-theological illiteracy).
- b. Esp. so in our proclamation of Christ—His Uniqueness, Exclusivity, Sufficiency.
 - i. *To proclaim Christ faithfully: Texts → Canon → Theological formulation.*
 - ii. In fact, every preaching of Christ is already entire Christology. *Christology* is the *test case* for one's entire theology.
 - iii. Turn to Colossians 1:15-20. Goal: To illustrate how to proclaim Christ in all of his glory, while also showing how these same texts "pressure" us to think *theologically* about them to correctly identify *Who* Jesus is; *What* he does.
- c. Three Steps: (1) Context; (2) Text Itself, and (3) Concluding Reflections.

2. Context.

3. Colossians 1:15-20.

- a. Intro: Text in 2 parts: Christ's Lordship in creation (15-17) and redemption (18-20).
 - i. It is one of the most profound texts in NT. It tells us not only *who* Jesus is, but also *what* he does. Clear affirmation of the deity of the Son (=also his humanity). What was asserted of Yahweh in the OT, is now said in reference to Jesus the Messiah.
 - ii. In fact, this text explains that Christ is LORD twice.
 1. Christ is LORD by virtue of who he is as the *divine* Son (15-17).
 2. Christ is LORD by virtue of his work as the *incarnate* divine Son (18-20).
 - iii. It is a text that cannot be understood apart from the OT, the Bible's overall story.
 - iv. Also, text leads us Trinitarian and Christological formulation (=Nicaea, Chalcedon). In history, a crucial text to reject two major heresies: Arianism and Kenoticism.
- b. **1:15-17: The Glory/Supremacy/Uniqueness of Christ in Creation.**
 - i. 1st: The Image of the Invisible God (v. 15). *2 observations.*
 1. *(1) Affirmation that the Son shares in the very nature of God.*
 - a. In the Son (=distinct from Father), God is perfectly *and* definitively revealed.
 - b. "Image" in biblical thought does not suggest, as it does in English, a copy that is less than perfect. Rather "image" is the real counterpart of the original.
 - c. *In him, the invisible has become visible.* If a person wants to know what God is like then they should turn to the Scriptures and look in the face of Jesus. See John 1:1, 14-18; cf. 14:6-9; Heb 1:3; 2 Cor 4:4, 6.
 2. *(2) This title is also linked to Gen 1:26-27 – "created in the image of God."*
 - a. We were created the climax of the first creation (Gen 1:26-27)—"image."
 - b. But before we existed, there was always the eternal Son, who, in his very nature, has eternally been the perfect "image of God"—*not at a finite level*, but as the one who perfectly reflects the nature of the Father. Archetype.
 - c. When we were created, we weren't created in an accidental fashion. We were created *after the divine pattern*—the Son—as finite representations

(Ectype). We were created to rule over creation under God's lordship – as finite people.

d. But, in Adam, we failed. In Adam, the old creation has come under the curse and the sentence of death—death reigns everywhere. Sin → death → wrath.

e. *What is the solution? What is our hope?*

ii. 2nd: The Firstborn over All Creation (v 15).

1. *Major controversy in Early Church* (=Arians, JW's).

a. Arianism.

b. Use of *monogenes*. Language of “begotten” and “made.”

2. *Semantic range*: Priority in time and/or rank (=Ps 89:27). *Context is key*.

3. See v. 16 (“because”). The Son is the Creator, not a creature.

4. Also, in the NT, “firstborn” always refers to Christ. In most contexts, the supremacy/priority of rank dominates (1 Cor 15:20; Acts 26:23; Rev 1:5).

Nicene Creed: I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, **begotten, not made**, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

iii. 3rd: *The Creator and Goal of All Things* (v 16).

1. Not only does he share in the nature of God, he also does *the very work of God*, thus equal to God and Lord over the entire universe. Note: How Christ's deity is given to us (identity, names, works, worship). Here the Son does the work of creation. He is its Creator/Lord. *3 further points*

2. (1) *2 forms of the verb used in v 16 (=aorist passive; perfect passive)*. So what?

3. (2) *'All things were created by him and... for him.'*

4. (3) *All things [things in heaven/earth, visible/invisible, thrones, powers, rulers].*

iv. 4th: *The Sustainer of All Things* (v 17).

1. *Another staggering statement*. But it should *not* surprise us given vv. 15-16.

2. *It speaks of Christ's total supremacy over creation: Creator and Sustainer*.

a. It requires triune agency. Again, to understand we need Father-Son relation.

b. Emphasizes that apart from the Son's continuous sustaining activity (=see perfect tense) all would disintegrate.

3. *Christian view of providence*. This world is not run by fate or chance.

4. But there is also huge Christological significance.

a. Perfect tense applies to the *incarnate Son*.

b. This is known as “the extra.”

c. This means that all Kenotic views are incorrect.

i. Kenotic is taken from Phil 2:6-11. Explain Phil 2.

d. How do we make sense of this?

i. Requires one person in two natures.

ii. Person is the acting subject through his natures. The natures are united in the person but not mixed. They retain their own attributes.

- iii. The person is able to act through both natures simultaneously, but the Son is not limited to his human nature.

c. **1:18-20: The Glory/Supremacy/Uniqueness of Christ in Redemption.**

- i. *Son is not only presented as LORD creation but also redemption.*
- ii. *1st: The Head of the Body, the Church (v 18).*
 - 1. *With these words, the centrality of Christ in relation to his people is stressed.*
 - 2. Paul often speaks of the church as the body of Christ and of Christ as head of it.
 - 3. It is tied to OT imagery of “representation” and “covenant relationships.”
 - 4. To speak of Christ, then, as head of the body is to stress:
 - a. His complete authority over and our dependence upon him.
 - b. His close personal/living relationship with his people as he rules over us.
- iii. *2nd: The Beginning and the Firstborn from the Dead (v 18).*
 - 1. *Meaning does not change from v. 15.* Although tied to “time,” it still refers to supremacy, as evidenced in the text.
 - 2. It picks up the theme of the “new creation.”
 - a. “Beginning” means a new beginning in terms of redemption/salvation. Salvation is presented in Scripture as a “new creation” (“new order”).
 - b. ‘Firstborn among the dead’ refers to new order due to Christ’s resurrection
 - c. See 1 Cor 15. Also see John 11:25 and John 5.
- iv. *3rd: Because Christ is the “beginning” and the “firstborn” in resurrection as well as creation, therefore he is LORD over all! And Lord twice!*
- v. *4th: The Possessor of all God’s Fullness (v 19). See Col 2:9. Temple Imagery.*
- vi. *5th: The Agent of God’s Reconciliation (v 20).*
 - 1. *When we think of “salvation,” “reconciliation” is one image of it.*
 - a. *Other images*—redemption, justification, conquest, new creation, etc.
 - b. *Reconciliation* means “to restore to friendship.” It is a family or personal relationship image, in contrast to a law court, temple. “Reconciliation” presupposes that an old relationship has been broken, and so in reconciliation two parties who were once opposed to each other, are brought together again.
 - c. *The central fact of humanity’s fallen state is its hostility to God.* By nature we are “haters of God” (Rom 1:30), “hostile to God” (Rom 8:7), “estranged and hostile in mind” (Col 1:21). As such we distort the truth of God (Rom 1:18-23; 2:1-5) and stand opposed to him. It is this alienation that produces all other alienations (Rom 3:10-18; Eph 4:17-19).
 - d. “Reconciliation” is always presented as the work of God—he takes the initiative to remove the enmity; we don’t initiate reconciliation with him (=theme of grace).
 - e. Reconciliation is achieved uniquely in the cross. Because of Christ’s atoning work—by taking our sin upon himself and paying for it and turning back God’s wrath that stood against us—he has won our “peace/access.”

2. *This is not universalism, but instead universal effects—new creation.*

4. **Concluding Application Points.**