

Colossians 1:15-23

Week 3 - The Six-Minute Gospel

Learning Objectives

- Understand Paul's point about the sufficiency and preeminence of Christ.
- Explore how we have been reconciled to God through Christ, which is the heart of the Gospel.

Icebreaker

? How would you explain the Gospel, in thirty seconds, to someone who'd never heard it before?

Pray for your time together.

Colossians 1:15-23 (NIV)

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or

Image and Firstborn?

At first glance, words like "image" or "firstborn" from Colossians 1:15 makes it sound like Christ is a copy of God or somehow less than eternal. However, we know from many of Paul's other writings that Jesus was fully God (Colossians 2:9, 1 Timothy 3:16, Titus 2:13). "Image of the invisible God" is likely Paul's way of saying that Jesus was the first visible manifestation of God's person, which had previously been veiled to humans. Additionally, "firstborn over all creation" doesn't mean that Jesus was the first being God ever created. The term firstborn expresses Jesus' pre-eminence, meaning that He is the rightful heir to all of Creation. First century Christians would have understood that Paul was holding Jesus up above creation, because Jesus was nothing less than God in the flesh.

*Resource: From Expository Files, Jon W. Quinn
<http://www.bible.ca/ef/expository-colos>*

authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on Earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Leader's Note: Just to recap: Paul was writing to the church at Colossae, which he did not plant and had never visited. He heard of the issues that the Colossians were having, and writes to encourage and correct their false assumptions.

? What are the false ideas that Paul is arguing against in this letter?

Possible Answers: That Jesus wasn't God; that God could not have created the universe; that additional work or knowledge, besides Jesus, is required to be reconciled to God.

? Why does Paul think it's important that Christ was the "firstborn over all creation"?

Possible Answers: This means that Jesus is God. Through Christ, God created all things, and through Christ, God was able to bring a broken creation back together. Jesus is the heir to creation in the same way that a firstborn son is the heir to his father's inheritance.

? What common misconceptions do

non-Christians have about the message of the Gospel?

Possible Answers: That the gospel is about rules and being judged, or that God loves everyone and that everyone will be saved and that there is no justice.

? Paul was trying to educate people about the Gospel, which they had trouble grasping. How does our society still struggle to understand the gospel?

Possible Answers: Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that Jesus is God, but an angel, a created being. Mormonism is much the same ideas. Plenty of prosperity-gospel proponents preach that God will make you rich; plenty of poverty-gospel preachers say the opposite. The Shakers (17th century) believed that sex was inherently evil, very much like the Gnostics' belief that the body was evil. Anything to do with snake handling.

Knowing Gnosticism

Though we only have Paul's letter to go on, many people believe that the Colossian church had fallen into an early form of Gnosticism – a system of belief that embraced spiritualism while treating physical matter (including our bodies) as inherently evil. Among these beliefs were some or all of the following: Jesus wasn't God. Since he was a physical being, he was inherently evil and thus could not be God. That God could not have created an inherently evil universe. And, that additional knowledge was required to relate to God, rather than just faith in Jesus.

? Do you ever have trouble believing any aspect of the gospel message? Why do you think you struggle with this?

Possible Answers: There are many feelings that are signs that we might not completely trust that Jesus has paid the cost of all of our sins; we may not even believe that our reconciliation to God is complete, without further action on our part. We must fight against these feelings. Jesus is more than enough to cover our sins.

? What does Paul mean when he uses the word “reconciliation” in verse 22?

Possible Answers: Since the world was separated from God by sin, a sacrifice needed to be made in order to atone for that sin. Jesus’ sacrifice absolves us of our sins and allows us to draw close to God once again. Without Christ we wouldn’t be able to have a relationship with our creator.

? Why does Paul highlight our obligation to be reconciled to God in this letter?

Possible Answers: The Colossians had lost sight of the Gospel, and had started to believe that Christ’s death and resurrection was not sufficient for salvation. Paul’s letter was a reminder that God was a just God, that sacrifice needed to be made for our separation from God, and that the only way to do this was through Jesus.

? As Christians, how should this reconciliation be reflected in our daily lives?

Possible Answers: We confess our sins through prayer, and understand that Christ has already paid the penalty for our sins through his death on the cross. Since Christ has mended our relationship with God, we should work to mend other relationships and point them to God.

? Even after being reconciled through Christ we sometimes live like we don’t know Christ. In what areas of your life do you live without God?

Possible Answers: There are times that it feels that God isn’t part of something in our lives, whether it’s a mundane job or a bad relationship. Like the Colossians did, we might fill in our lives with things besides God, that we deem necessary for our life or our walk with God.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Do you ever feel like the Gospel isn’t enough? Other than God, what things do you run after in search of meaning?

? Are there any aspects of your life where God is calling you towards reconciliation? What steps can you take this week to pursue reconciliation?