



Who Is Jesus? [1]

[1:15-20]

Chris Bullard

“And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (1:15-20).

ONE SOLITARY LIFE

Here is a young man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness. He has no credentials but Himself.

While He was still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While He was dying, His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth and that was His coat.

When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that one solitary life.

George Peck

We all know the writer of this well-known piece is referring to Jesus Christ. But how can this be? Who is Jesus, that He could have this kind of impact on human history? God, through the Bible, tells us in Colossians 1:15-20.

A little boy sat on the floor drawing pictures while his mother was cleaning up the kitchen. She asked him, “What are you drawing?” He said, “I’m drawing a picture of God.” “But no one knows what God looks like,” she said. “They will when I get through!” the boy replied.

Paul must have felt like that boy when he finished penning these dramatic words in Colossians. What a tremendous and astounding picture Paul painted, removing any confusion, allaying any doubts over who the Lord Jesus Christ really is!

One of the greatest controversies to rage in early church history occurred in the fourth century over this very passage. In modern times probably no other passage in the New Testament has been written about more by scholars than this

one. Paul, waxing so majestic, so poetic in these verses, gives a description that defies a simple analysis. We could approach these truths about Jesus in many ways. For the sake of simplicity, though, we will organize our thoughts around the four occurrences of the phrase "He is."

HE IS GOD'S IMAGE (1:15)

Who is Jesus? In the first place, in relationship to God, Jesus is His image: "He is the image of the invisible God" (1:15a). One of our characteristics as human beings is that we believe most readily in those things which we can see. In fact, we have a saying about it: "Seeing is believing." One difficulty people have in believing God is that God cannot be seen. Even as great a man as Moses had the longing to see God. He pleaded with God, "O Lord, if I could just have a glimpse of You!" God replied, "I'll give you a peek at My glory as I pass by you; that is all you can cope with." (See Exodus 33:17-23.)

Through the ages, men and women have longed to have a look at God so that they could have a better understanding of who it is that they serve. People have tried to make idols to represent God. But we are absolutely forbidden to make an idol because we cannot accurately portray God. The best we can do is produce something that misrepresents God, something that distorts and corrupts other people's understanding of what He is like. Early in the Bible we read where our God absolutely forbade the making of any image that pretended to represent what He is like.

But what man could never accomplish, God did for us by sending His Son into the world to be the *visible image* of our *invisible God*. He did it so that you and I might be able to more fully grasp what our God is like.

The Greek word translated "image" in verse 15 is *eikon*. The Greek Orthodox Church thinks of an *eikon* as a little picture, a little painting people use to help them visualize a Bible person or Bible event as they worship. In effect, Paul says that Jesus is the perfect portrait of the Father. But He is better than a portrait because He lives, moves, and talks!

Do you have a passport? (If you do not, think about your driver's license.) If you do, inside your passport is a place for your picture. That picture is a representation, an image of you, to

show the authorities what the person who owns that passport looks like. That way when you pass from one country to another, the officials know that you are who you claim to be!

In Paul's day, Roman citizens also had passports that they used as they moved between the provinces of the Roman Empire. Instead of a photograph, each passport had a section called "distinguishing marks." Here were listed all those traits that set a person off from everyone else so that an official could know that the person who owned the passport and the person who handed him the passport were one and the same. The Greek word *eikon* was used in the passport as that part which we translate as "distinguishing marks."

**"Everything
that makes God
different from people
around us can be seen
in Jesus perfectly."**

Jesus is the *eikon* of God. He carries all the distinguishing marks of God's character. Everything that makes God different from people around us can be seen in Jesus perfectly. We have now not an abstract God, but a concrete God. We have a God who has entered into human history and vividly displayed for us what He is like so we can know Him.

In John 14 Jesus told His disciples, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Philip replied, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." And Jesus answered, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (vv. 7-9).

To see Jesus in action, to hear Jesus speak, to see the compassion of Jesus is to understand what God is like, for He is the image of God. He reflects the very character of God.

HE IS GOD'S FULLNESS (1:15, 19)

Jesus is not only the concrete expression of what God is like, He is also the *complete* expression of what God is like.

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him (1:19).

For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form (2:9).

Jesus is not something like God. He is not a caricature. He needs no supplement. Nothing needs to be added to the person of Jesus to give you the total concept you need of God. Everything God is, Jesus is. That is why the writer to the Hebrews could say of Jesus: "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, . . ." (Hebrews 1:3). If you want to get to know God, get to know Jesus.

Paul goes on to say that because Jesus is the image of God He is "the first-born of all creation" (1:15b). What does this mean?

In the year A.D. 318, a man named Arius started one of the great controversies in the history of the early church by arguing that Jesus was the very first thing that God created, and then Jesus created everything else. He reasoned that, after all, the obvious meaning of "firstborn" is the one born first. That, of course, led to his conclusion that Jesus was not divine.

The early church, led by a brilliant young man named Athanasius, soundly rejected that view in time and branded it as heresy. The historic view since that time has been that Jesus, because He is the image of God, is eternal just as God the Father Himself is eternal. He is "very God of very God," as Athanasius put it.

Though it has been sixteen hundred years since Arius and Athanasius battled it out, the problem has not disappeared. Some religious groups do not believe that Jesus is God or that He is eternal.

Much of the confusion about who Jesus is centers around Paul's phrase that Jesus is "the firstborn of all creation." How are we to understand this word "first-born"?

It is true that the word naturally means the one born first. Thus, we read in Luke 2:7 that Mary "gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Since Mary later gave birth to other sons and daughters

(see Matthew 13:55, 56), the obvious meaning of this verse is that Jesus was the first child that Mary gave birth to in order of time.

This is not the only meaning, however, for the word "first-born." In several verses in the Bible, the word refers to position, not order in time. That is, "first-born" becomes a title indicating one who is an heir, an owner, one who is given the place of honor.

For example, Jacob gave the blessing to his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48). When their father, Joseph, saw Jacob giving the blessing of the first-born to Ephraim, he corrected his father, reminding him that Manasseh was first-born. But Jacob told Joseph that he knew what he was doing. "Ephraim shall be the first-born," he says, and he gives him the blessing of the first-born child. In fact, in Jeremiah 31:9 God says, "Ephraim is My first-born." Thus, the title of "first-born" could be given to someone other than a son who came first in order of time.

The same thing occurs in Psalms 89:27 where God says of David, "I also shall make him My first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth." Quite obviously the word "first-born" indicates the rank, the preeminence that God was going to bestow upon David over all the other kings on earth.

"First-born" is a title of status, not of sequence. Applied to Jesus the word means that Jesus is the Owner, the Possessor of the creation.

Paul explains why Jesus has been given this title of "first-born."

**"Before
Jesus the carpenter
made stools, Jesus the
Creator made stars."**

HE IS GOD'S AGENT (1:16)

Jesus was the agent of creation. "For [literally, "because"] by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth; visible and

invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him. . . ." (1:16). This verse clearly teaches that *all* things that have been created were created *by Jesus*. It follows, then, that Jesus cannot have been a part of that "all."

Everything that was ever created was brought into existence by Jesus. Before Jesus the carpenter made stools, Jesus the Creator made stars. Before He fashioned plows, He fashioned planets. Before He made tables, He made trees from which those tables would be made.

But Paul says He not only made the visible things we see such as stars, trees, grass, lakes, and mountains. He also made all the invisible things that fill our universe. Electricity, radiation, magnetism, gravity—all those things which cannot be seen with the naked eye were brought into existence at His command. He owns it all as God's first-born because He made it all!

HE IS GOD'S AIM (1:16)

Jesus is also the aim of creation. The whole of the cosmos was made "for Him" (1:16). It exists to declare His glory and to give Him honor. I have often pondered why Jesus made galaxies that are billions of light years away, stars so far away that I will never be able to see them with my own eyes. Now I know one reason why: Jesus made them so I could understand something of the magnitude of His greatness. That is the purpose of our universe—to move us toward Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Who is Jesus? He is the image of God. To see Jesus is to see God. To love Jesus is to love God. To worship Jesus is to worship God. That is the reason God the Father has given Him the place of preeminence in the universe.

Satan does not want us to believe this truth. He wants us to have some kind of watered-down view of who Jesus is. We read, "The god of this world [i.e., Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan's goal is to get people to believe that Jesus is anything but the very image of God Himself. Have you heard someone say that Jesus was just a great teacher, a good example of high morals, or just a man used of God to do a lot of good in His time? Satan has blinded that person's

eyes to the truth about Jesus. He is misinformed! There has never been another on the face of the earth like Jesus. He was God come in human flesh.

We do not need horoscopes or astrologers. Jesus is all we need. He is God. He made all things, and all things were made for His pleasure and honor. He is the One to be worshiped!

Christ, The First-born

1. Christ, the first-born of creation
"The first-born of all creation" (Colossians 1:15).
2. Christ, the first-born of Incarnation
"She gave birth to her first-born son" (Luke 2:7).
3. Christ, the first-born of resurrection
"The first-born from the dead" (Colossians 1:18).

Paul's Power

A Word Study

"Paul was not limited to his own human resources for the power to succeed. Rather, he labored in accord with Christ's 'working which worketh in me mightily.' The Greek term *energeian* ('working') is the source of the English word 'energy.' In the New Testament it was used only by Paul, and he employed it always when speaking of superhuman power. Six times (Colossians 1:19; 2:12; Ephesians 1:19; 3:7; 4:16; Philippians 3:21) it described the power of God in operation, and twice (2 Thessalonians 2:9, 11) it referred to Satan's power. It always denoted effective power, power which was able to accomplish whatever task it undertook. Thus Paul says he could rely upon the power of God which was always sufficient for the work to be done, and which was at the moment of writing putting forth its energy 'in power' (*en dunamei*; KJV, 'mightily'). The fact that God was working in Paul, however, did not lessen the apostle's need to involve himself strenuously in his gospel labors. It merely meant that his labors and struggles would not be futile because God was empowering him. The message of Christ the Reconciler would succeed because God Himself supplied the power to sustain His messengers."

Homer A. Kent, Jr.,
Treasures of Wisdom