



Who Is Jesus? [2]

[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).

In February of 1633, Galileo Galilei, an Italian astronomer and physicist nearly seventy years old, traveled to Rome to face the dreaded Roman Inquisition to be tried on the charge of heresy. The trial dragged on for several months. Finally, on June 21 of that year, Galileo was found guilty and denounced for having held and taught the Copernican doctrine, that is, “for holding as true the false doctrine . . . that the sun is the center of the world and immovable, and that the earth moves.” He spent the last eight years of his life under house arrest, an ill man, broken in spirit.

From that time until today a great battle has been waged between religion and science. With the passing of time, the conflict has only escalated. The “battleground” has been altered; the “weapons” have been modernized; the “carnage”

is not so shocking. But the battle still rages. The breach between the two sides shows no evidence of being mediated.

Galileo had hoped to demonstrate that science and religion complemented each other. He once observed that “the Bible was written to show us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.” Thus, he believed that science and Scripture could embrace each other and enrich our view of God’s universe. That view is no longer considered feasible. Every citizen in our land is being called to make a choice between science and religion as the foundation for understanding our universe.

Victor Stenger, a professor of physics at the University of Hawaii, has said:

Physicists are now claiming that the hundreds of billions of stars and galaxies, including the earth and humanity, are not conscious creations but an accident. There is no Creator, because *there was no creation*. . . . It is fair to say that *there is not a single shred of evidence that demands that we hypothesize that the universe was created*, and we can now at least provisionally understand how all we are and all we know could have come out by chance.¹ (Emphasis mine.)

Modern science says we are here by accident; the Bible says we are here by design. Are we the product of chance, or are we the product of a

¹Victor Stenger, “The Universe Was Created by Accident,” *Science and Religion: Opposing Viewpoints* (St. Paul, Minn.: Greenhaven Press, 1988), 118.

Creator? We cannot hold to both views. If you are a believer in Jesus, you must accept as fact that we exist and that our entire universe exists because we and the universe were created by Jesus. God has told us: "For by Him [Jesus] 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" (1:16).

JESUS AND CREATION (1:17)

Who is Jesus? He is the image of God. What God is, Jesus is, and nothing less. And He is our Creator.

In relationship to the creation, Jesus is pre-existent and eternal: "And He is before all things" (1:17a). Words are important. Notice carefully what Paul wrote. He said, "He *is* before all things," not "He *was* before all things." This is timeless being. Right now, at this very moment, Jesus *is* before all created things. You and I are bound by time, but our Creator is not. You and I dwell in this moment, but He dwells in all moments at the same time. "That is staggering," you say? Yes, but because you and I cannot comprehend it that does not make it any less true.

What Paul wrote in 1:17 is another way of saying what Jesus Himself stated in one of several controversies with the religious leaders of His day.

Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God'; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him, and if I say that I do not know Him, I shall be a liar like you, but I do know Him, and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." The Jews therefore said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:54-58).

Jesus did not say, "Before Abraham was born, I was"; He declared, "Before Abraham was born, I am." Many Bible scholars deny that Jesus ever claimed to be deity or to be eternal. Evidently, they never read this verse! When Jesus said, "Before Abraham was born, I am," He identified Himself with God the Father, the great "I AM" of Israel (Exodus 3:14). Jesus used the same phrase that God had used to express His own eternal existence. The Jews knew exactly what Jesus was

claiming for Himself. They considered it blasphemy, a crime which called for the death penalty: "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple" (John 8:59). It is an audacious claim that Jesus makes, but one that makes sense if He is indeed the One who created all things. Nothing that has been created existed before Him. Jesus predates everything and everyone.

"Jesus predates everything and everyone."

Not only is Jesus before all things, but "in Him all things hold together" (1:17b). That verb is a perfect tense verb in Greek which means something has occurred in the past and still has continuing effects. In this case, Paul affirmed that Jesus brought everything into being in the past and He keeps it in being. The writer of Hebrews concurs: "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3a).

Our world enjoys different seasons because the earth is tilted at a 23° angle. If the earth were to deviate from its tilt, the vapors from the oceans would move north and south, covering the earth with ice. What keeps our planet on the right angle? Scientists can describe many laws that are at work, but what makes those laws keep at work? Jesus Christ.

Our moon revolves around the earth in an elliptical orbit averaging a distance of 230,000 miles from the earth. It is the moon's gravitational pull on our planet that gives us our high and low tides twice a day. Were the orbital distance of the moon from the earth to change significantly, the ocean tides would flood the land twice a day. What keeps the moon in just the right orbit? Scientists can give many scientific explanations, but why do the explanations work consistently? For only one reason: Jesus Christ. He makes our universe a *cosmos* rather than a

chaos daily. He holds everything together in working order by His powerful word.

If God forgot the world; forgot for just one day,
Forgot to send the sunshine, and change the
night to day;
Forgot to make the flowers grow; forgot the
birds and bees,
Forgot to send the sweetness of the south wind
in the trees;
Forgot to give us friendships, forgot to send us
rain,
Forgot to give the children play, forgot to soften
pain;
What would happen to this world and us?
Would we still be gay?
If God should forget—forgot for just one day?

Who is Jesus? In relationship to our universe, we affirm that He is the eternally pre-existent One who not only brought our world into being but also keeps it functioning from day to day.

JESUS AND THE CHURCH (1:18)

In relationship to the church, Jesus is its head: “He is also head of the body, the church” (1:18a). A group of people on planet Earth recognizes the lordship of Jesus over His own creation. That group is called the church. The church is, of course, the new creation.

The metaphor of a head and a body is one of Paul’s favorites for discussing our relationship to Jesus. Frequently in his letters, Paul describes the church as a flock, a family, a building, but no figure of speech is used as often or developed as thoroughly as this one of the head and the body.

What makes this image so powerful is that God has given each of us a model to carry with us wherever we go. Each of us has a body, and the church is a body. Each of us has a head, and the church has a head. We are living parables of a great spiritual truth. If you want to understand Jesus’ role in His new creation, think about your own body.

What does your head do? It brings direction to your body. It solves problems and supplies nourishment. It coordinates and orders the activities of the body. It is the source of life. The body can survive the loss of a finger, a leg, or an arm, but it cannot survive the loss of its head. What your physical head does for your physical body, Jesus wants to do for us, His spiritual body, the church.

We are not just a collection of individuals who happen to believe the same ideas. Each of us is a part of a greater whole. We are to work

together, coordinating our ministries, sharing our concerns, letting the love and forgiveness of God run through our relationships with each other as Jesus our head directs us, His body.

If a church is dead and lacks direction, why is that so? Because Jesus is not the head in that church. He is no longer given the central place. The church no longer gathers to pour out praise to Him and learn from Him how He wants them to live. Instead, members are working off their own agendas, attempting to get the rest of the church to do what they want done. When that happens in the physical body, we call it spastic. And it is dishonoring. The same is true in Jesus. His body exists to follow His directions, to pursue His agenda, to learn from Him its objectives and purposes. When a church follows Him, it shows that He is truly its head.

Who is Jesus? In His relationship to God, He is His image. In His relationship to the universe, He is eternally pre-existent as its Creator and Sustainer. In His relationship to the church, He is its head, giving life and direction to His spiritual body.

JESUS AND CONCILIATION (1:18-20)

In relationship to sin and guilt, Jesus is the great reconciler: “He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything” (1:18b). Jesus was the first person to ever be resurrected. You ask, “What about Lazarus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Jairus’ daughter? Were they not resurrected?” In one sense they were. But the truth is, they came back to the same life they had left. But Jesus was resurrected with a glorified body, subject to different laws and governed by different principles. He is now forever immune to death. One day His followers will follow in His likeness.

For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

Jesus is the beginning. He is the first to experience resurrection power, never to die again. He is also the first-born from the dead. He will not be one among peers. Instead even in heaven He will continue to hold the place of supremacy.

To speak of Jesus' resurrection is to be reminded of the reason He died in the first place.

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 (1:19, 20).

God accomplished creation through Jesus Christ, and He accomplished re-creation (or redemption) through Him as well. Paul connects the deity of Jesus with His reconciling work. Jesus had to be whom we have claimed He was in order for God to do through Him what He did. If Jesus was not God, then we have no Savior. Because He was fully God come in human flesh, He was able to live a sinless life and then die the brutal death on the cross in order that we might be reconciled to God.

The glorious truth of Scripture is that our hostility and rebellion is never greater than God's love. At Calvary God reached out in His incarnated Son to restore our broken relationship with Him. The result is that we have peace with God. We do not have to live our lives dreading death and wondering if we will be acceptable to Him. We *are* acceptable because of Calvary. Through the costly blood of Jesus, we are at peace with God.

CONCLUSION

Jesus alone claims to be God and the way to peace with God the Father. This unique claim about Jesus sets Christianity off from every other world religion. C. S. Lewis wrote:

If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, "Are you the son of Bramah?" he would have said, "My son, you are still in the vale of illusion." If you had gone to Socrates and asked, "Are you Zeus?" he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, "Are you Allah?" he would first have rent his clothes, and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, "Are you Heaven?", I think he would have probably replied, "Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste."²

Only One claims to be God and the only Way to God—Jesus Christ. He is the Savior, the Creator, the head of the church, and the exact representa-

²C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 157-58.

tion of the Father. He is eternal God, and He deserves to have every place of pre-eminence in the universe. Have you given Him the place of pre-eminence in your own life?

The City of Colossae

Colossae was situated in the upper part of the Lycus Valley less than a dozen miles in a southeasterly direction from Laodicea. The city was built on a double hill just south of the Lycus River and not far distant from the Botzeli station of the modern railroad. To the south of it rose 8,000-foot Mt. Cadmus, whose melting snows formed streams that hemmed the site in on two sides.

According to both Herodotus and Xenophon it was a place of importance as early as the fifth century B.C. The nearby new towns, Laodicea and Hierapolis, later outstripped it in importance, but it must have been a strategic military base originally, dominating the road eastward toward Apamaea, Pisidian Antioch and the Cilician Gates.

Colossae was also a mart for the wool industry, its product called the *collossinus* being famous and attracting numbers of Jews.

Coins from Colossae indicate that by the time Christianity came to the city, numerous pagan deities were adored there, including the old native Phrygian god Men, as well as Isis, Serapis, Helios, Artemis, Demeter, and Selene. The reference to pride in visions and "being puffed up without reason" by a sensuous mind (2:18) is understandable in the light of the Phrygian background of the city and its interest in the mystery cult of Isis.

The name Epaphras borne by Paul's disciple, who had been active in introducing Christianity to the cities of the Lycus Valley, is an abbreviated form of the common name Epaphroditus. An inscription from Colossae mentions an individual named T. Asinius Epaphroditus. The name was also found on a marble altar from Laodicea uncovered at Denizli, the modern successor of Laodicea, a few miles south of the ancient ruins.

The ruins of Colossae offer a challenging area for future archaeological research, since the site possesses "historical renown plus an accessible site completely unoccupied."

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