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# ALTERNATIVE REALITY

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## Part 2 - Alternative God

Who did you want to be like when you were younger?

Who were your heroes? Who were the icons, those who held that cult status, the arbiters of cool, suave, etc?

We are in a series on Paul's letter to the Colossians: a letter written to people who the Apostle Paul was yet to meet, but who were on his heart and mind, because he met Epaphrus, a leader from the Colossian church.

### Thanksgiving

Colossians 1:15-29

Paul begins with thanksgiving, but this isn't merely a greeting. Paul is being economical with his words, and setting up the key point of the whole letter. Not correction, not rebuke, but encouragement: a revelation of the true reality that everyone who follows Christ is now a part!

Paul is drawing the reader to the understanding that what is now true of those in relationship with Jesus: that you are, in some way, 'in Christ'.

### An Epic Poem vv15-20

It's all about the supremacy of Christ.

V15: He's *before* everyone else: Jesus is God, and the expression of God, and is before all else.

V16: He's the one who did the work of creation (clearly alluding to Genesis here). As the visible version of the invisible God, He is superior to any authority figures, both visible and invisible.

V17: He's around everything and keeps everything moving. (Reminiscent of Acts 17:28 – "In Him we live and move and have our being.")

V18: In the church? He's in charge, He's the decision maker. First one raised forever, so that He can be in charge of everyone raised forever.

V19: He is fully God and fully man.

V20: Because of all of this: His pre-eminence, His resurrection, His 'fullness of God dwelling bodily'. He is reconciling all things to Himself. He is bringing creation and all created things back into the order that He intended when He first made it. Now Jesus is the enactor of the new creation. This is Genesis re-done, this is creation re-made, this is who this Jesus is!

## We're All Pretty Impressed Down Here...

Why does this matter? Why did Paul write this? Remember – it's written for us but not to us. What can we learn from why Paul wrote this?

Paul is affirming the ancient commandment: 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exodus 20:3), in the assertion that Jesus is that same God, and to follow anyone else, no matter how charismatic, is idolatry.

*"Colossians 1:15–20 gives the church not merely an exalted view of Jesus, and hence of humanity, but of God and his world. God, man and the world are each now to be understood in relation to Jesus Christ. He makes the invisible God visible; he fulfils the Father's reconciling purpose on the cross; he is the Father's agent in creation and redemption. He is the truly human being, the true Image of God. He is Lord of old and new creation, being in himself the beginning of the latter, the first created being to attain the state of perfection which will one day be shared by 'all things in heaven and on earth'. It is this Lord that the Colossians have come to worship, his 'image' that they will one day fully share (3:10). This is the fact to which Paul now turns, applying the poem to the young church he is addressing." – NT Wright (Colossians and Philemon, TNTC, 2015)*

## So what does that mean for us? vv21-24

Paul really reminds us now of the good news of Jesus: how this person who is above and over everything ended up the central figure of all history, and in the life of the believer.

We were off doing evil. But, like we are made (in part) of flesh and bone, Jesus came walking in our place, living our lives, experiencing it all just like us, but didn't live in the same way. So as He gave His flesh to die (it's not used in the sense of evil flesh here – just that He had skin and bone), He included us in that.

Why? So we can be restored to right relationship with God, cleansed not by our best efforts but by His, not because we're innocent but because He is, and He has made us like Him.

That's good news!

## This Changes Everything...

Jesus is supreme above everything... Jesus is enough! You have been saved from evil and sin, and now He presents you blameless before God. Jesus is enough!

Stay focused on Him:

- + Because we become like what we behold...
- + What we worship, we replicate in ourselves...
- + What our eye hooks to multiplies...

Jesus demonstrated the love of God in this: when we were hostile, He reconciled us to Himself, because in doing so we are reconciled to the Father, we re-enter relationship, and we find life.

So, Paul then shows us what that looks like in his life.

*“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church...”* – Colossians 1:24 (ESV)

What is Paul trying to say here? Was Christ NOT enough, after you just said He was?

Well, there are a few schools of thought...

- + Corporate Christology: What’s true of Jesus becomes true of us, when we are ‘in’ Him. Therefore, Jesus’ sufferings were not insufficient for salvation and redemption, but in fact were true of him, so Paul is participating in the fulfilment of Christ’s sufferings by joining in His sufferings.
- + The other is that, in Jesus, the new creation was begun. The old way of the world is passing away, and the new one has begun. But, like the battle that determines the outcome of the war may not be the final battle of that war, Jesus started the new creation. But until His second coming, there is still suffering on behalf of others. In that way, we also participate and fulfil the role of the suffering servant on behalf of others.

This is part of the calling of the Church – this is why it’s an alternative reality, why it’s hard to fathom when you don’t have an alternative king showing you the way: because it must be just like Jesus to willingly go through anything hard for the sake of another.

## The Hope of Glory vv24-29

We, as saints, receive the revelation of a mystery hidden for ages, but revealed in Christ. It's not simply that we are 'in' Christ. It's that Christ is IN us! That is the certain expectation of future good – the hope of glory.

This is what we carry around in us alongside the suffering. If we join Him in His suffering, surely we join Him in His resurrection.

Paul concludes this section, on his ministry reflecting the ministry of Jesus:

*“For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”* - Colossians 1:15-29 (ESV)

What does it look like to work with His energy? If He really is supreme, preeminent, above all and dwelling in you: what does that look like?

**Questions:** What things do you have on your list to do tomorrow that you need His energy to fulfil? Where do you need HIS power working tomorrow?

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### Discussion Questions:

1. Who did you want to be like when you were younger?
2. Who were your heroes? Who were the icons, those who held that cult status, the arbiters of cool, suave, etc?
3. What can we learn from what Paul wrote about Jesus in verses 15-20?
4. Jesus is presented as the most excellent person to follow and base our lives on. How is He different to those people in what He means to you?
5. What has the good news of Jesus looked like for you?
6. How then do you go about living out the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in your own life?
7. What does it mean to you to not just be 'in Christ', but to have 'Christ in you'?
8. What was your answer to the question in the message: Where do you need His power in your life tomorrow?