

Colossians 1v 18

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[0 : 00] We shall turn out the epistle of Paul to the Colossians, the first chapter and verse 18.

Colossians chapter 1 and verse 18. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.

That in all things he might have the preeminence. That last clause especially, that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Now the church at Colossae, as I suppose most of us know, it was a church which was plagued with false teaching.

And one which was, it appears, very partial to heresy in its membership and among its office bearers. There was a plea for new ordinances.

[1 : 22] A plea for new mediators. A plea perhaps above all for new experiences. There was a certain discontent with being what we might call mere Christians.

And the people seemed to want more. They wanted more commandments, more prohibitions.

A wider area of worship and devotion. They wanted deeper and more spectacular experiences. And to all of these, the apostle has a specific answer.

Meeting all those movements in detail. Meeting all of them head on. Meeting all of them head on. And yet, always there is one great answer in principle.

That is the answer which is implicit in the fact of Christ himself. And implicit especially in the glory and in the grandeur of Christ.

[2 : 39] and time and again Paul says to them if only they would grasp the majesty and the glory of the Savior then they wouldn't want new ordinances they wouldn't want new experiences they wouldn't want additional mediators because in Christ himself we have every ordinance that man could wish for we have every experience that man could wish for we have every intermediary that man could wish for and it is precisely because of all those practical problems that there is so much tremendous teaching in the epistle with regard to the glory of the Savior the apostle tells them that Christ is God's dear son he is the son of God's love and because of that the power of his redemptive work is absolutely final and all avail he tells them again

Christ is the image of the invisible God he tells them also that in Christ there is all the fullness of God and that means that we don't need any more revelations we don't need any more experiences say the one that brings us into union with Christ we don't need any ordinances above those which the Lord himself has laid down in Jesus Christ there is all the wisdom of God there is all the power of God that as if I may use the word there is all the merit of God and therefore to be in Christ is complete and Paul goes one stage beyond that he wants to emphasize that not only is there complete redemption in Christ but he wants to emphasize the all embracing dominion and sovereignty and control of the Lord when men pled for new mediators when men laid down new commandments and new forms of worship

Paul says the real problem there is a fear a fear that there is something greater than Christ something beyond Christ that we must placate and we must control the possibility that Christ is not the ultimate that he is not the last that when we have worshipped him and when we have embraced him we have left something beyond him and something greater that is still unappeased with and that is still undealt with and what Paul is trying to do for these poor Colossians is to de-demonize their universe to bring them face to face with the fact that Christ is the last Christ is the ultimate Christ is the supreme Christ is the greatest that in all things he might have their preeminence there is no greater power there is no greater force there is no greater angelic entity than the Lord of glory in all things he has their preeminence and if we have dealt with Christ if we have embraced Christ if we have responded to Christ if we have Christ then we have and we have dealt with what is final

and what is absolutely ultimate in all things he might have their preeminence and I want for a moment today to extrapolate this clause this emphasis on the supremacy of the Savior that in all things today he has the preeminence let's look at it in terms of its practical relevance for ourselves that we live in a world in which Jesus Christ is utterly supreme a world in which wherever we look we find a preeminent a dominant and all controlling

Savior what does it mean it means first of all the preeminence of Christ in and over the political sphere Paul talks of powers and we today can talk of powers of great empires of human beings in whose hands there is concentrated power that is almost unlimited politicians who control great empires who have a power of life and death over hundreds of millions of men and women who have behind them enormous financial resources and who have behind them enormous military resources a power that often strikes terror into the hearts and minds of those who contemplate it power to unleash unqualified destruction upon the world in which we live and sometimes as we contemplate that power we feel utterly terrified we feel totally insecure in this world in which we find ourselves and yet we have to face this great fact that over those politicians and all the power that I present Christ has their preeminence that over them too Christ stands supreme whether it is the Chinese empire the Russian empire the American empire and all these things Christ has the supremacy he is before all the politicians by him all those politicians exist it is by his grace by his favor that they enjoy the power and the position which they do occupy and so in that sphere that sphere of power that sphere of compromise that sphere of manipulation of negotiation in that sphere Christ has the preeminence in that sphere Christ reigns supreme it means that those politicians are bound by the mandates and by the parameters that Jesus

[10:52] Christ has laid down he has ordained them and he has ordained them to be a terror to the workers of iniquity an encouragement to the workers of righteousness he has given them to man in order to establish through them quiet and peace and honor and godliness these men are bound by the mandates of Christ their power is not absolute power their power is a power of stewardship they're there to enact God's laws they're there to pursue God's priorities they're there to live with an aspiration for the glory of God they're there to advance that quiet that God has mandated to pursue the peace which God requires they're there to make it possible for men and women to live in godliness above all they're there to make possible human lives which have honor human lives in which there is no oppressive poverty in which there is no illiteracy in which there is adequate housing adequate education in which men can live their lives with dignity and they shall answer to God they shall answer to

God in Christ they shall answer to this one who has the preeminence over them for the way they have used this political power they have no right to disregard moral considerations they have no right to ignore spiritual considerations they have no right to ignore the fact or the reality of Jesus Christ in that sphere in that political sphere Christ's principles apply in that sphere Christ's standards apply and those who live and function in that sphere will answer to the Lord for the way they have conducted their ministry and their stewardship but it means for politicians also this it means that their hearts are in the hands of the Lord at one level they are obliged to enact God's principles and God's standards at another level we have the tremendous fact that their hearts are in the hands of the Lord so much depends on the decisions of our great politicians in Britain and internationally and sometimes their competence for that decision making seems so limited their intellect seems so frail and sometimes with advancing years their very sanity seems to be in question and yet upon their decisions from day to day there depends the very survival of our civilization and how tremendously comforting it is to realize that the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord that at last their decisions are dictated and controlled not only by their own intellects and by their own prudence and by their own ambitions are bounded not only by their own character and personalities but are bounded by the will and by the decree of the living God in Jesus Christ God in Christ turns the hearts of politicians whatever way he himself decides and I would not want you at all to accept that is offering some naive comfort that does not mean at all that the world will not face calamity and face caraclysm we can never argue from the fact of the sovereignty of Christ over politics we can never argue from that fact that we shall never know nuclear holocaust or never know global destruction because God may decree judgment and God may decree wrath but we do know that God will act righteously and God will act in conformity to his own holiness and to his own character and I think as we contemplate today the frailty of our own democracy as we contemplate the intellectual inadequacy of those who administer and those who are candidates for

administration it does seem to me the only comfort we have that in the last analysis it is God's will that will be done that he works all things according to the counsel of his own will

[17 : 06] God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform he plants his footsteps in the sea and moves and walks upon the storm sometimes those processes by which your politics grind out their own solutions seem so irrational seem so ungodly sometimes global politics seem to yell their defiance at God but in the last analysis whether it be individual politician or the aggregate of the political systems of the world God will move them God will bend God will adjust them to his own great purpose and his own great purpose is the purpose of love so from

God they have their mandate and by God at last their decisions and their policies are disposed and that is the third thing that those politicians ultimately are God's servants and serve God's purposes and by God I mean constantly Christ they're Christ's servants you remember in the Old Testament how God refers to Cyrus as his servant Nebuchadnezzar was his servant and these men weren't Christians these men weren't Jehovah these men weren't godly men these men weren't men of principle these were pagans these men were ungodly these men were anti-godly they were idolaters they were tyrants and yet it was God's purposes they were working out you have the same thing with regard to

Caiaphas and Pilate those men were politicians and they were unprincipled and they were unscrupulous and yet they are there at the very heart of redemptive purpose of God they are there at the very cross of Calvary itself they are integral to God's will for our salvation they have this central role in the very enactment of the cross itself so that by the hands of lawless men God enacts the salvation of the world and it's still so those men who seem in all their decision making to have no reference to God these men are yet silently and unconsciously working out the purpose of God they are being used by him for the advancement of his own kingdom for the extension of the sphere of influence of the

Christian gospel the lamb is in the midst of the throne and all those politicians and all those political systems and all those agglomerates all of these are working out their purposes of the Savior that's the picture the Bible gives us deep and unfathomable minds of unmeasurable skill God is working out his own designs and enacting his own sovereign will and all we can see and hear is chaos and cacophony all we see is right to the kingdom of Christ all we see is setback all we see is opposition and hostility and in and through it all

God is working out his will God is enacting his own sovereign purpose and so in this political sphere first of all Christ has the preeminence he lays down the principles that must govern politics he moves the hearts of the politicians and he uses them and their policies for the advancement of his own kingdom the advancement of the purpose of his own love let me apply it in a second area a very different area the preeminence of Christ in the Christian home because there too surely is a sphere of enormous importance the state on the one hand the Christian home on the other and in this sphere surely again

[22 : 27] Christ has the preeminence and that preeminence goes back to the very origination and foundation of the individual Christian family at its very inception Christ claims preeminence in this fact that he says we are to marry only in the Lord it is absolute prohibition and it is absolute that believer should marry unbeliever and of course one is conscious that that principle can be complicated and its relevance blurred by our own emotions because sometimes there is love there is attraction and there is eros that disregards a principle we can love we can be in love across this divide of believer and unbeliever no reason why not

Christian in love with non Christian and at that point it is so tempting for us to mention that the love the emotional affection makes our situation unique and gives us the warrant and the mandate to violate the principle and we may say that because we are in love because there is so much love because there is so much affection so much devotion that we can disregard the principle and we can marry not in the Lord we can marry against the Lord many Christians have had a struggle with that great principle how to bring their emotions under its control how to think and decide that their emotions shall not make the decision that the principle shall make the decision that here at this most crucial point in life when we set upon when we leave father and mother when we set up a family that at that point

Christ shall have the preeminence and that no matter how painful the choice may be we shall submit to the principle out of deference to him in obedience and in loyalty but also the consciousness and the terrible persuasion and assurance that we can never find happiness in

defiance of the will of Jesus Christ so there at that point of elementary decision making with regard to believer and unbeliever in marriage at that point we say Christ has the preeminence and he has the same preeminence right through that life that family that marriage preeminence in that he is the pattern and he is the model that governs and defines and illustrates and regulates all the relationship and all the affection he becomes the pattern of love husband loves the wife as Christ loved the church with the same dedication with the same devotion with the same creativity nourishing and cherishing so that as Christ utilizes and stimulates and unleashes all the talents and gifts and aptitudes which the church possesses so the Christian husband is not simply a dominating and oppressive and repressive ruler and head but he is a creative head nourishing cherishing stimulating so that the wise personality is also developed and strengthened all her gifts and all her talents are matured and are applied it's one of the saddest things in the reformed churches to see how one side it is our whole approach in the situation men grasp the principle the husband is the head of the wife and that's all they seem to grasp and they do not grasp this other main principle that headship means nourishing and cherishing it does not mean the negation or the stifling or the erosion of the wise personality so that she is simply his reflection and his shadow but it means that by his encouragement and with his comfort and by his leadership she develops and becomes even more of a person in her own right just as the church of Christ is immensely enriched by her union with her

Lord and Savior and just as that richness shows itself in all the variety of her charismata and her gifts and talents and all the splendor of her collective achievement so the Christian wife is enriched by her marriage with a Christian husband who loves her as Christ loves the church and when we talk of the illegitimacy of Christian wives working and so on we have I think to begin to reflect at a very much deeper level and to ask ourselves what do we mean by cliches of that kind and we have to remind ourselves that marriage is not about the development of one partner at the expense of the suppression of the other it is about mutual enrichment so that each is the better of that great relationship we are to acknowledge the Lord's preeminence in that we marry only in the [29 : 11] Lord also in the fact that we are to love according to the Lord's own example and we are to acknowledge also in this that we are to bring up our children in the Lord in the knowledge and in the admonition of of the Lord that in the way that we manage our own children our own family we are to acknowledge this same preeminence bring them up in the knowledge of the Lord not only knowledge about the Lord but in the knowledge which the Lord imparts bring them up in the admonition of the Lord in the admonition which the Lord imparts what do I mean I mean this that so often we are simply impulsing upon our children our own prejudices our discipline far too often is the result of a reflection only of our own moods we have it in

Hebrews 12 where the apostle says we have had fathers of the flesh and they chastened us according to their own pleasure it was whimsical it was arbitrary it was often irrational it was ill-tempered Paul says instead we are to give them the Lord's admonition we are to forbid what God forbids we are to enjoy what God enjoys and we are to be very very sure that we are not simply being arrogant we are not simply being traditional we are not simply being selfish but we are administering God's education and God's discipline children are God's heritage I do not think that means at all that we are to raise them in the hope that someday they will become God's heritage certainly does mean that they are a heritage God has given to us it always means that those children belong to God they're always God's children they're never my children never our children always God's children and I have this terrible stewardship I am to bring God's children up and it would many a day help to lower our voices and control our tempers and mitigate our own harshness if we're to reflect Luke that's God's child and there must be firmness although in my experience and judgment the lack of that is not the problem it is made out to be it would certainly be true that in parts of the city of Glasgow where we have the highest level of violence in the British Isles that the problem in the homes there is not the absence of the rod it is not that the rod is spared that is not the problem it is the absence of affection of security of love these children do not know what it is to have security and I have been perplexed often by the spectacle in many foreign circles just as the husband bosses the wife so parents discipline their children harshly as in that were the essence of biblical parenthood the Bible says provoke not your children to wrath don't exasperate them don't bewilder them by the irrationality and by the inconsistency and even by the cruelty of your own discipline but bring them up like God's children in the knowledge and in the admonition of the

Lord himself but I must move on we have looked at this principle as it applies in the political sphere secondly in the family thirdly and briefly its application within the church of Christ now my concern here simply is this that what is laid on for us is the headship of Christ in the church he is the head over all things in and for the church he has preeminence in the church the problem is this that there arise always in the church of Christ men who want to be lords over God's heritage men who want to be the heads of the church or the heads of congregations and that is the great peril that faces a man like myself in the ministry that we can arrogate to ourselves a position which is not ours it has its most obvious development in the papacy where you have absolute and uncontrolled headship over the body of the

[34 : 51] Lord Jesus Christ Christ now what I'm saying is this that all our authority as elders ministers is the authority of stewards in other words we do not make the rules for the church Christ makes the rules and we administer the rules and the church is never our property it is never my possession it's never mine to do what I want with it I must accept constantly that it is the church of the living God now sometimes I think we tend to forget that we tend ourselves as ministers to lord it over the elders and over the people we tend as a collective eldership to lay down rules that

Christ has not laid down let me take one point which is slightly provocative and which won't be misunderstood can it be made a condition of church membership that the applicant attends the prayer meeting now it's a great sadness in many parts of the church I don't know this particular church that so few people do attend and it is an alarming thing a symptom of the present low level of spirituality that the attendance is so unenthusiastic but it still is a question is attendance at the prayer meeting a conditional church membership the question is not whether it's desirable or whether it's expedient but whether as a steward as a servant as an under shepherd

I have the right to make such rules my calling is to ask Christ what he wants to ask Christ what the rules are and then to apply them let me go into another area we have no right to pursue objectives for the church other than those which Christ has laid down and yet how faithful and how honest are we in this particular sphere go ye therefore and teach all nations in all things Christ has preeminence and yet in many of our churches is there a complete lack of goal allied to total complacency indeed allied sometimes to an all too evident spirit of superiority over other Christians but by what mandate do we enact or administer churches that defy the commission of Jesus Christ churches that don't have goal the master says go teach in all things he has the preeminence and it's no you saying to him lord we don't go teach but we have marvelous discussions and we have purity of worship and we have the Sabbath in all things he has the preeminence the terrible business facing preacher of today is to be in a church the free church face to face with a stringent word of Christ in his gospel to preach

Christ to preach the mind of Christ and the commission of Christ so that our churches are run on the lines that Christ dictates I can't develop this I'm simply asking to what extent do we realize that we are underlings that we ministers are underlings and that the elders are underlings that we have to ask Christ what the rules are ask him what the objectives are asking what the message is asking what the organization should be and then at last this the preeminence of Christ in the individual life he is preeminent in the political sphere he is preeminent in the family he is preeminent in the church he is preeminent in my own individual life or see is it true again that

[40 : 39] I can say that for me to live is Christ do I recognize that all I am is his that all I have is his and do I humbly confess that indeed his glory is my priority there are just those two points which emerge from that the one is this am I always content when I know that what I have is the will of Christ the whole problem is that so often we put our will over against the Lord's there are things that we want desperately we don't always ask if Christ wants us to have them we have our own dreams our own ambitions our own priorities and in the providence of

God which is always the gracious providence of God these things do not materialize our dreams fail our hopes are dashed and what are we left with are we left with nothing are we left with only shattered hopes we're never left with nothing never never never left with nothing we're all was left with the will of God nothing can deprive us of the providence of God in my failed examination in my unfulfilled ambition in my shadowed dream I have the will of God and I'm never to say

Lord there is no road from here I'm never to say Lord that's the door closed that's the gate slammed I've always to ask well Lord I didn't expect to be here but now that I am here where do I go from here where is your glory here where is my salvation here where is your word for me here well maybe we haven't many of you maybe you haven't had many shattered dreams maybe God has

been kind maybe you're too young but one day there will be shattered dreams shattered in the will of God shattered in the love of God doors closed by his grace always by his grace working all things together for good to them that love

God that includes our failures that includes the mistakes we make it includes those many many points where we must read the guidance of God and we make your own wrong decisions and find ourselves in the wrong place I'm still there in my mistake and there in my misunderstanding and there in my wrong turning there in my apparent cul-de-sac there in the fearful pit and the mighty clay is the will of God that will which always has potential that will which always has the possibility of growth and development and victory conquerors more than conquerors in all these things how do you take disappointment how do you take frustration how do you take shattered dreams and frustrated ambitions how do we sit under our juniper trees shedding our tears our tears of self pity our tears of egotism or do we say to

God Lord thank you for making your will so clean and now show me the way forward because the one thing I want is that thou wouldst have preeminence and it is one of the great things in the Christian life that sometimes in experiences that other people think are so painful you have the tremendous comfort of knowing that God's will has been revealed with unmistakable clarity that can be a tremendous comfort because what you want is the will of God the second thing in it of course is that our life my life is for the glory of God my life finds its contentment in being in the will of Christ my life finds its purpose in burning for his glory it means that my own life is one of doxology in which we say thanks be to

[46 : 54] God blessed be God glory to God we have to change I suggest to you the mode of our music far too much of our music of our singing I mean metaphorically is in the minor doleful mode I don't say but that mode has its own great place in God's final orchestration but I read that in dwellings of the righteous has heard a melody of joy and health and if Christ has the preeminence then the great note in your life as your life sings the great note is glory to Christ and you would also want that your life would make other people sing glory to

Christ that is the greatest and the grandest thing Lord all I want is to be thy will all I want is by my life to glorify thee and all I want is so to live that others would glorify thee well I'm asking then does he have that preeminence today in her own individual life or in her many lives is it sadly true I have the preeminence I am the most important thing I me my and my own that in all things I might have the preeminence being converted doesn't automatically destroy that self centeredness and the battle

I want you to fight is the battle to effect this revolution this copernican revolution to take self from the center and place Christ at the center so that of you too it's true that all you want is to be in the will of Christ all you want is to glorify Christ all you want is so to live that others glorify Christ may God bless this world let us pray oh Lord we acknowledge our need of rebuke of criticism we acknowledge our ineptness before thy word we acknowledge oh Lord that many of its categories and ideas are far beyond our powers of management and application we pray today that thou would give us grace so that for us in all that affects us and all we belong to Christ may be preeminent guide us through this day use us for thy glory for our Savior's sake amen