

12 giving thanks to the Father, who made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; 13 who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love; 14 in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins; 15 who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things are held together. 18 He is the head of the body, the assembly, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. 19 For all the fullness was pleased to dwell in him; 20 and through him to reconcile all things to himself, by him, whether things on the earth, or things in the heavens, having made peace through the blood of his cross. (World English Bible)

When Moses stood before the burning bush—after having been called out to deliver his people—he asked a very important question.

Who knows what that question was?

That's right. "Who shall I say has sent me?" Knowing "who" is really important. If you know "who" then you often automatically know "why" and "how" and sometimes maybe "what" and "when" and "where" also.

Did you ever get a "breather" on the phone? Someone who called but didn't say anything, but you could tell that they were still on the line? What did you do? Probably the best thing to do is just hang up. But if you did do something, it was probably asking, "Who IS this?!?!" or "Who ARE you?"

In the Christian year, we are gradually moving toward Easter—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the son of God.

After Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey colt like a king and after he had gone to the temple and tossed out the money changers and after he had begun to teach in parables and even challenge to the religious leaders—those leaders asked that question: "Who are you?" or maybe more likely, "WHO do you think you are?" or "By whose authority do you do these things?"

I would guess that a lot of people saw Jesus during his ministry and asked similar things, "Who is this man?" The same thing was asked over and over shortly after his death and his resurrection.

We now have the benefit of near 2000 years worth of writing and Christian philosophy and discussion and religious tradition behind us. Early on that was not the case. The Gnostics taught one way and others put in their few-cents worth—but there remained much to be defined if they were going to hold together under Jesus' name instead of becoming just another Jewish splinter group.

Enter Paul of Tarsus.

Even though some of the Disciples wrote about Jesus and certainly helped the new church understand who and what he was—it was Paul who was by-far the most influential in defining what Christianity was and is. This includes how we understand Jesus and his work. In the first chapter of Colossians, Paul gave them (and us) a very clear picture of the person of Jesus.

“Who is this Jesus?”

Even though the question has been answered and answered, it still comes up and different people have different answers—even people in the church. It seems that some Christians don't have a clear picture of who they worship.

We are entering the season where we celebrate the culmination of the work of Christ—the end of his life and resurrection. Easter is nearly upon us. It is important that we understand who he is in order to understand the importance and the power of his work and of this season.

As we seek to answer the question, reading Paul's description in Colossians gives us seven clear details pertaining to the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

First: in verse 15 Paul tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Maybe it is the literalist in me, but that is a difficult concept. I wonder how something can be the image of something that is invisible.

When I was about 11 or 12 (and yes, I can remember that far back) I went shopping for school clothes with my mom. She was devastated by the fact that I wanted to walk ahead of her or behind her—and didn't want to be seen shopping with her.

She took that very personal, but I didn't want to be seen as still being a child—needing his mother to help him shop. In fact, I DID need her to shop because she had the car and the money.

Another thing I didn't understand that everyone else my age was in the same situation—having to shop with their moms, too. But I had to keep up my IMAGE. Not how I was SEEN but how I was understood by other pre-teens.

Jesus of Nazareth was the image of the invisible God—not in how he was seen but how he can be understood—in his essence and his nature.

Who here remembers the barber shops of the olden days—when men and women went to two different kinds of hair-cutters? Do you remember the bottles of scented waters? There were others, but I remember some were rose water and some were lilac. Alcohol and water and glycerin and the ESSENCE of lilac. Did that liquid LOOK like a flower? No, but it smelled like the flower, because it had the essential elements of lilac.

Jesus was the image of the invisible God because he had the ESSENTIAL elements of God.

Let me touch on another phrase—the one found in verse 19—because it also speaks to Jesus being the image of or the essence of God. *For all the fullness was pleased to dwell in him;*

The Gnostics of the day denied that Jesus was of the same essence as God and Paul used a technical term here in “fullness” which means, “the totality of the divine powers and attributes.”

That same Greek word is used in Mark 8:20 after the feeding of the multitude with a few loaves and fishes. Several baskets of leftovers were taken up and they were full to the top with all the “attributes and essences” of loaves and fishes.

Second and third: He is first in time and first in position. Verse 15 says that he is the first-born of creation. That is NOT to say that he is a created being, because the next verse calls him the AGENT of all creation and he couldn't have created himself. If we look at the accent on the Greek word and change it slightly, that little difficulty goes away. The word translated as “first-born” then becomes “first-parent.”

It is also possible possible to understand “first-born” as king or lord. For the Hebrews, the heir—the one with authority to govern—was the one with the highest rank. The king is, then, the first-born and those terms are synonymous.

Both “first-parent of all creation” and “king of all creation” fit with the definitions of Jesus the Christ that we find elsewhere in scripture in in church tradition.

Verse 17 also adds a first in time and first in honor statement: *He is before all things and in him are all things held together.*

This is much like that found in John 8:56-58—*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. 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, “Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM.”* And also in The Revelation 22:13—*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

The Christ WAS before Abraham. He WAS before creation. He WAS and IS first in line. Being first is both a position and a place of honor. You've heard “Ladies first,” and that honors women. “Women and children first” in a disaster is a similar honoring. When you go to a banquet, who sits at the first table? Those who are honored guests or those who are being recognized. This scripture says that Jesus the Christ was first in time and is first in honor.

The second part of verse 17 is a lordship phrase. All things are held together by him or “consist” in him—that word has to do with coherence—the universe is held together and literally “makes sense” through our Lord—Jesus the son of God.

Fourth: Jesus Christ is the creator or the agent of creation. Verse 16 says: *For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible*

John 1:3 makes it even more short and sweet: *All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made.*

The Gnostics of the day taught that Jesus was a created being, just like the angels. Paul was directly attacking that belief.

As the agent of creation—literally as the PARENT of creation, Christ created the things in the heavens (including the angels) and the things on the earth (including the earth.)

What Christ created in the heavens and on earth can be visible or invisible—seen and unseen and even known and unknown by humans. This creation includes you and me. It includes the mountains and oceans and the moon and stars. It also includes universes and even the laws of physics. It includes the souls of men and women everywhere.

Even the powers on earth: *thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and for him.* In the New Testament writings of both John and Peter, it is made clear that, at the very least, those in charge have been allowed to be in power by the Lord—Jesus the Christ. The Greek tense of “have been” speaks to continuing action. HE created in the past, but everything REMAINS created in the present by HIM.

Fifth: Jesus Christ is the head of the body of Christ—the church. Paul was fond of using this word-picture. The church is the body and Jesus is the head. Just as Jesus is first in time and first in position, he is also first in the church—first in spiritual things.

Of course Paul was not just talking about the church at Colosse and he wasn't just talking about Zion Christian Church. He was talking about the church universal—the corporate church—the church of all times, from then until the end of the age.

There are a lot of important parts to our bodies There are several parts that we can't live without—but we might still argue that the head is the most important. If you lose a leg you will probably survive. So it is with many other parts. You may NEED them but you can probably do without them. I know several commercial fishermen and I can tell you that most of them are missing a finger or two and yet they function pretty well.

But we need our head to stay connected to our bodies—because it tells most of the rest of our bodies what to do and how to do it. If you separate a head and a body—the body will still LOOK functional, but it won't be. Without a head, we die.

I'll bet you already know where we are headed with this, huh?

I'm afraid that many local churches—local bodies of Christ—are trying to function without their head. The body looks just fine, thank-you-very-much and like that chicken your grandma was preparing to cook for dinner, it can even run—but doesn't know where to go.

Those bodies have organs/members/parts that are physically perfect, but have no signals—no instructions to tell them how to act, what to do, or where to run. Many churches look fine but they are dying because they are separated from their head.

We need Jesus, with his spiritual sight and spiritual hearing and his spiritual instructions to guide us and make us alive.

Sixth: In verse 18 we see that Jesus the Christ is the first-born of the dead. He is the first to have been raised by his own power.

He is the first of many—who will be raised by his worthiness and his holiness and his sacrifice. By his own hand of salvation. Those who believe on Jesus as Christ and as Lord of creation will follow him in resurrection. Not by our worthiness, but by his.

Seventh: In verse 20 Paul describes Jesus as the “reconciler” of creation. He “makes peace by the blood of the cross.”

I was looking at the word “reconcile” and I realized that if I was going to REALLY understand what it meant, I would have to look up “concile” because it means to concile again. Now I know that is being pretty picky and pretty technical, but Vonna will tell you that is my nature (and I'll let you in on a secret—it doesn't ALWAYS make her happy.)

Anyway—to concile is to make two things compatible. To re-concile is to make them compatible AGAIN. Before the fall of humankind, God and humans were compatible. Adam and Eve could walk and talk with God. There was no barrier between God and us. Now there is. We are no longer compatible. In a sense, we can see that all of creation has fallen and needs to be made re-compatible. The Genesis story tells us that even the weeds in my garden ultimately come from the fall of humans.

I have to remind myself of this sometimes. When I sit with someone who has lost an innocent child to disease or accident, I try to remember that from weeds to pain to disease to death—this world isn't now what it was created to be.

Paul tells us that it is the work of Jesus of Nazareth to bring God and us—God and creation back together. To reconcile us. Look around you and you will see that this is certainly a huge job. Who could accomplish such a thing?

God sent a little baby.

A baby who was the very essence of God. A baby who was first in time and first in position and in honor. A baby who was the agent of creation. A baby who was and is Lord and sustainer of that creation. A baby who would be the head of the church. A baby who would become the first-born of the dead—the first to be raised by his own hand. A baby who would, one day, bring God and creation back together.

WHO do we worship?

Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem. He is who we worship today.

The baby who was and is the essence of God himself.

The one who willingly laid down his own life so that we might live.

