

That in All Things He Might Have the Preeminence

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For a meditation before the communion service, a familiar section of Scripture, the book of Colossians, the first chapter. There in verse fifteen where it says, Christ, His dear Son, God's dear Son, is the image of the invisible God. The first born of every creature, for by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were recreated by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things, He might have the preeminence.

Now, that's what Paul said, breaking into it and breaking out of it again. That chapter where it clings together by a tight logic, that one has all but to do violence to it, to select anything from it. But here in verse eighteen particularly, I want you to see that He is the head of the body, the church. He who is the beginning. He who is the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.

Now here is Christian truth. Not all Christian truth is here, but all that is here is the proper object of Christian faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us to understand that after His going, some unnamed person or persons should receive new truth, which He could not give them because they were not spiritually in a position to receive it yet. That's found in John 16. And it seems that Paul became the principal one of those so honored to receive and transmit truth that even our Lord was unable to transmit, because of the condition of the people's hearts before the coming of the Holy Ghost. Paul was not one of the original twelve, but he was called and prepared under most extraordinary circumstances that he might receive the revelation. And now he tells us in this book of Colossians, it's 1:18 that I have read twice now in your hearing, what we are to believe.

And so, out goes our vaunted independence. And out goes our appeal to reason, because bluntly, this is above all ability of reason, to receive, or at least to discover. And this is above all the powers of the enquiring mind ever to reach or to learn. And out goes our liberty to pick and choose. A heretic they say, is one who picks and chooses. That's what the word means. He likes certain passages, and so he picks them and chooses them as his creed. He dislikes others and he rejects them. But there is no liberty for any Christian at any time to decide what he wants to believe.

This is the book of God I hold in my hand. And when an apostle moved by the Holy Ghost, says, that He is the Head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, and that in all things He, Christ should have the preeminence because it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell. And that He, having made peace through the blood of His cross, reconciled all things unto Him, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. We are therefore not to pick what we shall like and what we shall choose to believe or emphasize. This is Christian truth to be received, whether we understand it or not.

Now, there is no coercion here however. No one needs to follow Christ. It is not incumbent. It rests not upon anybody. There is no obligation there except the high obligation, which the sinner does not admit. But no one need follow Christ and no one will be forced to do it. All nature obeys Him. And so all nature holds together, and in Him all things consist. But the creatures who kept not their first estate, chose not to obey Him. And all the long history which antedates even the history of mankind, is strewn with wrecks of their lives, and mankind has chosen not to obey Him. And the price man has paid for his refusal to obey is written in tragic letters across the face of the world, written on the bloody highways over this weekend, written on the police blotters, written in the death cells, written on the charts of the hospitals, written in the wild walls of the insane asylums, written all over the world that men would not obey Him. But you and I, as His professed followers are to obey Him. We must. It's not a question of whether we understand it. It's a question of, He said it, and therefore we obey it, and we believe it.

Now, faith and unbelief stand together outside the temple, and they look in and there in the dimly-lighted, mysterious recesses of that many-roomed temple, they find mysteries. The mystery of the Trinity stands at the beginning. And the mystery of sin and Adam's fall, and the mystery of incarnation and Christ's Atonement, and the mystery of salvation by faith, and the mystery of the resurrection. All this is there in its beauty in the dimness of the temple. And unbelief sees it and walks away, and says, I cannot understand it. I will not walk into the soft-lighted temple. I want to be out where I can see where I am walking. But faith bows reverently and walks inside. And the mysteries instantly flame up and become a bright and shining light that lights them more and more unto the perfect day.

So, you and I are to believe what God says about His Son, not stand outside in our human pride lighted by the sun of reason alone and say, I can't understand it, therefore I reject it. We must come on in. And when we get inside, we'll find we can understand it at least to our heart's content, if not to the pride of our intellect.

Now, it says about Him here, that He is the beginning, the original, of the old creation. You see my friends, there are two creations extant and they coexist, to use a modern word, in the world in which we live. There is the old original creation and the new creation, created in Christ Jesus unto

good works, and of that old creation, He was the originator. And that old creation through sin is moving toward dissolution and judgment at last.

And you can't get away from the word "world." Hardly a newspaper, I suppose there hasn't been one printed in the last 20 years that hasn't had the word *world* and in some place. I suppose scarcely a sermon has been preached or a prayer made, but what the word *world* has been used in it, that word. And what is it after all? But there is a new world and He is the original of the new creation. The new creation is moving away from death, and the old creation is moving toward it. And the new creation will finally displace the old, and be there with eternal permanence.

The world is a collaboration between men that die and forms that perish. And that's all we have in the wide world, men who die with an unbelievable shrewdness and skill, take forms that perish and recut them and shape them, and arrange them and put them together and come up with astonishing things from the simple wheel to the hydrogen bomb. And that we call a world. The men die and the forms perish. That is the world. That's the old original world.

Now, my feet are down on that rock, I believe that. I couldn't rest on isolated texts my friends; I couldn't possibly do it. Those who want to isolate a text and give it to me and say, now you believe this text. I believe it alright, if it's from the Bible, but if I can't relate it, it won't do me very much good. So not an isolated text, not one doctrine handed to me, but this is the foundation, the rock upon which everything else is built, that there are two creations and that one of them is on the way to perish and the other is on the way to immortality. That one was the old creation which was ruined by the fall, and the other, the new creation, which was made one in Christ Jesus. And it's made up of all who have believed down all the years of every tribe and tongue and color and nation and language and level of education or culture, from the time that Abel offered his acceptable sacrifice, down to the latest convert in Borneo or Peru.

So, this is the message we have that Jesus Christ is the original of the new creation. He was the originator of the old creation, but he is the original of the new creation. And because the new creation is to be born out of death, He is the first born from the dead. And because the church is the first of the new creation, along with her Head, Jesus Christ, why He is said to be the Head of the body, the church.

Now, Paul leads up to this, that in all things Christ might have the preeminence. And I, whenever I get hold of a word like preeminence, instinct tells me if nothing else, but that's an important word. And I went into the original to see what it might mean; and it just means preeminence. It just means that He's the most important one. It means that He is the Chief One. It means that He is the top one and that there can be no higher. It means He has authority above which there is no authority. It means that. It just means that. So, we'll not to try to display any Greek here. We'll just say it means preeminence. Everybody knows what that means. Eminent, eminent, they say, on a

high, rocky eminence means a mountain, way high there. And then, when you put the word "pre" on it, why you have elevated it, so it looks down on everything. And this is our Lord Jesus Christ. In all things, He might have the preeminence--all things.

Now, the term, all things, includes the philosophic universe, the totality of existence. It means life and matter and form and substance and law and spirit and intellect. It means the physical, the material. It means relations. It means laws. And it means all the totality of created things. And in all things, He has the preeminence. And it also denotes heavenly and invisible bodies; persons and spirits and creatures of which you and I know so very little; and the strange beings with four faces and six swings, and the fiery burners before the throne of God. And those watchers and holy ones, those beings that race with the speed of light through God's vast creation and run to the help of the people who shall be heirs of redemption. And it means all that and of all things He shall have and does have the preeminence. He is the preeminent One. Rise as high as your imagination will lift you, and when you have gone to the highest eminence, there is one that stands on the preeminence above all the highest eminence you can conceive.

I smile sometimes at the names, the grandiose titles we invent for each other. Plenipotentiary. I always thought that was a lovely one. A plenipotentiary, I don't know what that is. And still, let's break it down here a little bit. Let's see, plenty means full in all, and potent means powerful. And the *ary* hasn't anything to do with the penitentiary, Brother McAfee. But plenipotentiary means that somebody who has all the power there is.

And the little fella has hardening of the arteries and fallen arches and he's lost his teeth and he's on his way to die, and yet he comes in robes and everybody knows. And the speaker gets up and introduces him. We present the plenipotentiary, the man who has all the plentiful power there is, says the Word. There isn't anybody like that, only one man and they called His name Jesus. And the only plenipotentiary there is, is Jesus Christ. No, we daren't use the word. Oh, if you put it in lowercase letters I suppose and printed real pale on the page, and have an understanding that we know what we mean, I suppose that we could without sin, call some old king or czar, a plenipotentiary.

But there is one that's above the all the plenipotentiaries and all the kings. Now, when I think of the kings and the mighty men that have walked over the earth and with the wave of their scepter have condemned thousands to die. I think of that story told us by the missionary of the tribal chief, I think in Africa, who managed somewhere to secure down at the coast, a barber chair, and he put that barber chair in his hut and sat in grandeur and regal dignity in the barber chair and received the plaudits of all of his followers.

And after all, what's the difference between the tribal chief in a barber's chair and a plenipotentiary surrounded by all the culture and tradition of mankind. There is only one about

whom it can be said, in all things He has the preeminence, and that all things fall down before Him, the philosophic universe, the totality of existence, the heavenly bodies, the kings and those in authority, and the princes and the holy ones and the watchers and the seraphim and the cherubim and the angels and the archangels and all the creatures about which we know only dimly or know nothing at all. By virtue of what He is and by virtue of what He did and by virtue of what God did for Him, He sits supreme in majesty above them all.

That's why, and I speak with apology to any of you whose feelings might be hurt by this. But, that is why I never could refer to the man who sits in Rome as a holy father. That's why I never could call him a holy father. He's a bachelor to start with, and how he could be a father and not be married is beyond me. And how you could call him the most holy father, I will never do it, never do it. While there sits One high and supreme on an eminence elevated infinitely beyond the highest man or angel or seraph. There sits our Lord Jesus Christ. He has in all things the preeminence. And since He has the preeminence, and since for a little time, we can't see it, but God is working out a plan that will display it. And since it's true, that in all the moral world He has the preeminence, and all the physical world, He has the preeminence. And in the fallen world, He'll take the preeminence when His time comes. In all this is a powerful argument for giving Him the preeminence now, in our lives. It argues with an unanswerable logic, that if He's preeminent in heaven, He ought to be preeminent on Earth.

And I read again yesterday, that which I think I quoted here years ago, that wonderful, strange saying to come from a man who doesn't claim to be a Christian, Aldous Huxley. That stream saying where he said this, that *our kingdom go*, must be always and forever the proper corollary to, *thy kingdom come*. And there cannot be, *thy kingdom come* until there has been *my kingdom go*, for no two kings can sit on any one throne.

So, if His Kingdom is to come, my kingdom must go. And prophetically and literally, when the kingdoms of this world go, the kingdoms then become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign on the earth. But there will have to go the rule of man before there can come the rule of the God-man. And what is true in society and in prophecy in future events, it's true right now in my life. My kingdom has to go. Nothing, nothing, nothing that this little dying man would like better than to sit on a throne. Nothing, that he would like better than to be called by magnificent titles and sit on the throne. And if he has to compromise with the barber chair of his own little ragged life, he nevertheless wants to sit on that throne. But my kingdom go before His Kingdom can come.

So, His preeminence in His universe argues and pleads and sings and preaches, that we give Him preeminence now. The wonder and the mystery of the human heart. How wonderful is the human heart. Bunyan called it, the kingdom of man's soul, and he thought of a single human heart as being a whole kingdom. They used to call it a microcosm, the little world, the whole world in little, lying

in the bosom of a man. And I can't prove this, and so don't ask me for the verse yet, but I feel and sense and intuit that there isn't a law nor a beauty nor a loveliness nor a glory anywhere in the created universe that hasn't been compressed into the human heart. God said, if nothing else, let us make him in our image and after our likeness.

And when God made man in His own image, whatever sin has done and however died, the human heart now may be through sin, potentially lying there is all the wisdom and all the beauty that God put in all in his creation, and He compressed it into the human heart. How wonderful is the human heart. Who has a right to preeminence there? Who has a right to sit there in relaxed majesty and rule the kingdom of man so? None other but He who was born of the Virgin Mary and be crucified under Pontius Pilate and to rise again from the dead the third day, to take His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, preeminent above all, preeminent in our hearts, the mysterious wonder of the heart. And He wants to move in there and become its King, its King.

I'm too democratic ever to wish we could have a king back. His Majesty is too big a mouthful for me. And if you are from Canada or England, don't feel bad, please. I'm just an old American talking. And I understand of course about those things. And I know what you mean when you say, his majesty. You're simply doing what custom requires, and you have as lofty a view of God as I have. But from my American tongue, his majesty doesn't sound smooth, unless I'm talking about the One who by a life laid down and taken again, Who by the holy mystery of virgin birth, Who by the deeper mystery of incarnation, and Who by the awesome, dark mystery of death on a tree, could be raised to the high preeminence so that archangels would fall on their faces before Him. And could take our form and our manhood and our blood and flesh, or at least our humanity, to the right hand of God, and look down on all the vast universe. If you meant His Majesty, I would gladly bow with you until my knees were callous before that Majesty. That in all things, He might have the preeminence.

In all our thinking and feeling and willing, in all our thoughts and word indeed, in our home and business and work and money and service, and you think for a second that it's easy for me to give the preeminence to Christ because I stand here in the pulpit, a bit elevated, a bit removed. It's harder or just as hard for this old heart to give Jesus Christ preeminence as it is for the man who drives the truck that picks up the ashes in the alley.

Jesus Christ wants preeminence, and He wants it in homes and business and work. He wants it in your monetary affairs. And this, to this glorious project, this church is dedicated. I pray that God will let me die or will let me move, or some providential arrangement will take me out of here before this church ever, ever allows itself, ever there's a member on the board, ever there's a superintendent in the Sunday school or teacher in any class, ever there's a young people's president or a prayer band officer, ever there's anybody that wants anything else except Jesus

Christ to have the preeminence. When that time comes, we're not only no longer an Alliance church, we're not even a church. We're not a church at all.

For a church is an assembly, met and gathered unto Christ. An assembly of redeemed people of all colors and classes, met unto Jesus Christ to worship Him. And to pray, and when need be, fast and hear God say, separate me Barnabas and Saul. That's a church. And when this church becomes less than that, I don't want to be its pastor. And in our service and in our worship, that Christ should be glorified. And in our all in all, in the service of the Lord's Supper this morning, we trust our Lord Jesus shall be glorified. Don't let's stare at each other, please, nor let's wonder who that is two seats in front. But let's, if not with closed eyes, at least with reverent hearts, think on the Lamb of God. Think on Jesus as we take of the body and the bread, the body and the blood, the blood of our Savior.

Now, Lord, Thou grant that this whole service today, everything, might reflect the honor, the honor, the Triune God, and that Jesus Christ might have high priority, top place in our thoughts and our feelings and in all are willing and doing and saying, for Jesus sake. Amen.