

Text: Colossians 1.15-2.13
St Stephen's

October 16th, 2005
Sat PM/Sun AM

Christ Above All

Have you ever had someone call you on the phone and offer you **the deal of a lifetime**? All they need is your social security number and your bank number and you are in! Immediately you want to check them out, because you know that lots of time in life, things aren't what people say they are. But every year thousands of hopeful, well intending folks are **scammed** by people like this. That happens in the **spiritual life** as well. Since the day Jesus stepped into the world there have been differing views on who he is and what he does. Differing answers to the great question, "Who do you say that I am?" The questions needs a true answer, not a scam.

Some of the earliest scams became known as the "**Gnostic Heresies**". They are the background to Paul's letter to the Colossians, and Paul warns about them in the 2nd chapter:

Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ.

Col 2:8 (NLT)

Paul is urgent about this because **the stakes are high**. You don't want to give your life to something only to find out that you have given your life to a lie. Sometime the danger and loss from spiritual deception is far greater the loss you face with a telemarketing scam.

Let's take a moment to get familiar with the Gnostic Challenge...

The Gnostic Challenge They believed...

- that spirit is good and matter is ***evil***
- that salvation is only for an enlightened ***elite***
- that God is removed from the evil creation by many 'emanations' ruled by spiritual '***powers***'
- that the key to spiritual life is ***secret*** knowledge and ***ascetic*** rituals

This kind of teaching was a constant challenge during the first 400 years of the church's life. You might think it doesn't have much to do with us **today**. Not true. The **#1 best seller of the NYT's book list** for the past several years has been a novel of fiction solidly inside the Gnostic family. Know it's name?

The DaVinci Code

The book follows a mind-blowing trail of clues discovered in the works of Leonardo DaVinci that lead to the center of a centuries-old secret society, and ultimately solving the mystery of the Holy Grail... It is a ride!

Along the way we discover that...

- **Truth** is a secret, known only by an elite few in the world... and that what you believe is true is a conspiratorial cover-up and a lie.
- **The Bible** not accurate or trustworthy.
- **Jesus** never saw himself as the divine Son of God, and the early church thought the same.

As a principle character says... *"almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false."* P. 235 Teabing

But isn't this **just a work of fiction?** Well, author Dan Brown says it is based on solid facts – but facts never mattered much to Gnostics anyway. So the book Brown **weaves together** a huge number of **circumstances, legends, conspiracy theories, facts and pseudo facts** in an engaging tale. And it is a scam.

Let's look at Paul's response. Take out your bible or use a pew Bible and turn to the Letter to the Colossians (Pew Bible page 1026)

Remember that as we said last week our minds are the **"control tower of our lives.** So Paul thanks God in 1.5 that the "word of truth" has come to them, and prays in vs 9 that our knowledge of God's will would increase and grow because he knows that if something goes wrong with our thinking, something will go wrong with our lives. So Paul confronts the Gnostic Challenge.

Paul's response to the Gnostics was to lift up Jesus and to **see him** next to everything that exists, to **compare him** in succession to **God** and the **creation** and to the **church** and then to the **cosmos** and finally to **you.** The result is a paragraph of the highest Christology in the Bible, the clearest, deepest look at the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ.

Paul starts in vs 15 with the **first snapshot** and sees...

1) Jesus Next to God...

The Gnostics didn't believe that God could be known, and they didn't believe that Jesus was unique. He was **only one of many emanations** of God. Paul responded to teaching like this by holding Jesus next to God with two startling sentences...

"He is the image of the invisible God"

Col 1:15

The word, "image" means sketch, picture, or painting. It is the word 'icon'. The people of Colosse would be familiar with **icons attached to professional contracts** – they were sketches and descriptions that served to **unmistakably identify** the individuals involved. Paul is saying that Jesus the unmistakably identifies God. Then he adds a second sentence (vs 19) ...

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, Col 1.19

Circle the words "**all**" and "**fullness**" Paul is making a larger point here, and he doesn't want us to miss it. He is saying that Jesus is not just a sketch, not just an outline of God, but **a full painting. A clear picture.** Nothing essential is held back. Do you remember how Jesus himself said it to Thomas?

John 14:9 *"He who has seen me has seen the Father..."*

The reason Jesus stepped into the world was to reveal God, to make him visible and knowable.

Paul turns (vv 15-17) to the **2nd snapshot** and then sees...

2) Jesus Next to Creation...

The Gnostics believed that creation was evil and that God couldn't have made it – and won't redeem it. But Paul uses a series of **prepositions** to describe something quite different. He says that the creation came...

"by him, through him, for him, in him"

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Col 1:15-17 (ESV)

This is Paul's shorthand for saying the Christ is the **author** of creation, its **architect** and **craftsman**, its **purpose** and eternal **destiny**, its moment to

moment **support and supply**. So “in him, all things” hold together. The Message paraphrases Paul’s words like this...

For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment.

Paul is bidding you to look up at the stars, look down into the sub-atomic structures and you will see the traces of **his handiwork**. Look carefully at your neighbor be he friend or foe, look deep within yourself... and you will catch a glimpse of **his signature** – you will understand that all was created:

“by him, through him, for him” -

and that is why **Augustine** said all shall be restless until they rest ‘in him’

Paul turns (vs 18) to the **3rd snapshot** and then sees...

3) Jesus Next to the Church...

Remember, he is speaking to this **little congregation** in Colosse. But that little church was the forerunner of something far greater. Why was that little church going to outlast every one of the great earthly kingdoms around it? Because **connected to that little church was this Jesus**, this risen Christ, the image of God, the fullness of God, the architect of the cosmos – He himself was

“he is the head [that] church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

Col 1:18 (NIV)

When you are connected to Him, **when you give him supremacy**, you are connected to the center and the destiny of the entire cosmos. That’s who you are, church...

Do you believe the greatness of Jesus?

Paul is not through yet; he turns (vs 20) to the **4th snapshot** and then sees...

4) Jesus Next to the Cosmos...

Look to the stars, majestically parading through the heavens, look at the supernatural powers you have believed in for centuries, look at every emanation, every realm, every dominion, every kingdom... Paul says, sweep it all up and see that **it is the purpose of Christ**...

"...to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

Col 1:20 (NIV)

All things. That is the power of the sacrifice of Jesus, to reconcile to God (take a breath with me here...) every galaxy, every nation, every star system, every race, every plant, every planet, every person ... There is nothing beyond his reach. Again, listen to the Message

all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross.

And then Paul turns to the final snapshot and brings it right home and sees...

5) Jesus Next to You...

Paul has four little phrases that put it all together...

Our Life is Christ

The evidence that all this is true is you!

Look at vs 21. "Once you" were alienated and enemies and evil... "But now" (circle the phrase) you are friends and free from accusation and reconciled and holy.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies... because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

Col 1:21-22 (NIV)

So...

"Christ is our life..."

Col 3:4 (NCV)

Yes, he is. Our beginning and our end. Our savior and king, our breath and our life. Yes he is.

Our Secret: The Fullness of Christ

The Gnostics had it right there is a secret. Paul says...

This secret is Christ himself...

Col 1:27-28 (NCV)

Nothing more is needed. Nothing less will do. Because in him...

"are hidden all the treasures..."

Col 2:3 (NIV)

He is the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field, the lottery you can win. Because all the fullness of God is in him. All God's resources, all his mercy, all his power, all his wisdom, all his character, all his purpose...

you have been given fullness in Christ...

Col 2:9 (NIV)

All given to you. Freely, fully.

Our Goal: Maturity in Christ

admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

Col 1:27-28 (NIV)

That is the goal of every ministry in this church, of every small group, every mission effort, every family circle. Nothing less. Like him on the inside. Living like him on the outside. (If you are worried about perfectionism – well don't. We have a ways to go before that becomes a worry!)

Our Ministry: Partnership With Christ.

In the great task of **being a disciple** and **making disciples...** Of **living it** and **giving it...**

I work very hard at this, as I depend on Christ's mighty power that works within me.

Col 1:29 (NLT)

There are a lot of people out there who are seeking and knocking and looking. Who feel that there **must be more**. But who have jumped from relationship to relationship, or career to career, or pleasure to pleasure... Who have fallen for too many scam. And who have not yet discovered who they really are, who and what they were really made for - and just feel life slipping through their fingers.

Dan Brown has nothing to offer but a good story. The DaVinci Code of Dan Brown's fertile imagination is a poor substitute for the Jesus Code written into the nature and the destiny of the whole cosmos. Have you ever met anyone who said, "The DaVinci Code changed my life!" Can you imagine anyone giving their life to the Jesus of the DaVinci Code?

Because people need something far more than a good story. We need a real life, a changed life, a forever life. A life written by the real Author, a life “free from accusation”, a life stretching out into a redeemed cosmos for never to be told centuries ahead.

There is one place to get that life. Only one place. It comes “by him, through him, It goes on forever for him, in him” **Nothing more is needed. Nothing less will do.**