

Articles by Martin Staveley

Martin Staveley

All material used by permission of the author, as published on
plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at <https://plymouthbrethren.org/author/667>

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

The Greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ

(Colossians 1:15,17,18; 2:10; 3:4,11)

In these passages, there are profound statements as to what Christ is, laying emphasis on the greatness of His person. This is presented more prominently in Colossians than in any other part of Scripture. It seems that Paul was led to make this presentation because of the fatal error of gnosticism which was evidently affecting the minds of at least some believers at Colosse. Gnostic teaching denied the deity of Christ, and held that He was but one, however elevated, of a hierarchy of angels, or spiritual beings; Colossians 2:18, 20-23 undoubtedly allude to such ideas. To counter those influences, Paul makes clear both the eternal deity of Christ and His infinite superiority to angels, as He is the glorified Man in heaven.

While it may be thought that such ideas as those of the gnostics are of little significance today, there are other false ideas and teachings emanating from the devil. He has never ceased to attack the person of Christ throughout the centuries, and Peter prophesied that there would be false teachers who would bring in destructive heresies, and deny the Master who bought them, 2 Pet. 2:1, R.V. We can see this fulfilled today, in movements such as the so-called "New Age", which contains elements of mysticism reminiscent of gnostic ideas. And apart from false teaching, there are many in Christendom, even true believers, who have but little appreciation of Christ's greatness and glory as revealed in this epistle and in other New Testament Scriptures. It is therefore most important that attention should

constantly be drawn to the greatness and glory of Him who is "made both Lord and Christ", Acts 2:36. There is an evident tendency on the part of many professedly Christian gatherings to adopt an unacceptable familiarity in addressing, or speaking of the Lord Jesus. This is often indicated by frequent use of the name "Jesus" on its own, and also by a general lack of reverence that is due to divine Persons. Contrast such familiarity with the attitude of the apostles. Paul, probably the only person who ever encountered the full glory of the Lord Jesus, said, "I could not see for the glory of that light," Acts 22:11. Thomas, confronted by the risen Lord, said, "My Lord and my God," John 20:28. Peter, who with James and John, was present with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, wrote, "we....were eyewitnesses of His majesty", 2 Pet. 1:16; and John, presented with a vision of the Lord Jesus, wrote, "I fell at His feet as dead", Rev. 1:17.

The Image of the Invisible God (Col. 1:15). The word "image" implies exact representation. In human terms, there can be no visual representation of anything that is invisible, but other Scriptures amplify the thought expressed in this title. Underlying it is the truth of the Lord's personal deity, and Hebrews 1:3 conveys the idea of that which is (spiritually) manifested in the Son of God. Not only has God spoken in Him, Heb. 1:2 R.V., but the Son is said to be "the effulgence of His (God's) glory, and the very image of His substance", Heb. 1:3, R.V. "Substance" refers to the essential being of God (not "Person" as in A.V.), and "effulgence" links with what can be seen. Of course this must be in a spiritual, not a physical sense. Only One who is Himself divine could be the image of the invisible God.

Firstborn of All Creation (Col. 1:15). It is important to understand that "firstborn", when applied to our Lord, has no reference to time, but relates solely to position, and is likened to the pre-eminent place that the firstborn son had in the ancient world. Verses 16 and 17 explain the statement, "He is the firstborn of all creation" (as in RV, not "every creature") by stating, in effect, that He (Christ) is "the characteristic power, the active instrument, and the end in creation" (see JND and note: the Creator came into His own creation). John 1:3 states the same glorious fact, "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made". Peter's statement in Acts 10:36, "He is Lord of all" is virtually the same. Following logically from this, verse 17 states that He is before all.

Here, "before" does refer to time. It is the same word as that used in Ephesians 1:4, "...chosen....in Him before the foundation of the world". This title, and the following statement "all things subsist together by Him", JND, plainly imply His divine existence and power. It is again seen in Hebrews 1:3, "upholding all things by the word of His power".

Head of the Body, the Church (Col. 1:18). In this title, the Lord Jesus is viewed entirely as Man; however, His headship extends beyond the church, and like "Lord" it has very wide application and significance. Thus in Ephesians 1:22, He is made by God "head over all things to the church", which clearly indicates the uniquely privileged place and relationship of the church, extending beyond anything applying to Israel. The wider extent of Christ's headship is involved in Ephesians 1:10, which declares God the Father's settled purpose in "the administration of the fullness of times (i.e. the

millennial kingdom) to head up all things in the Christ", JND - things both in heaven and on earth. Everything in that scene will be under the direct control and influence of Christ as Head, the assembly being seen to be united to Him there in glory - a wonderful prospect!

Who is the Beginning (Col. 1:18). An unusual, possibly unique, use of the term "the beginning". The Lord Jesus Christ as Man is this in the sense of being the origin of everything that is for the pleasure and glory of God. All those who came and went before Him, who in any way answered to God's thoughts, only did so as faintly foreshadowing particular features of Christ as Man, for example His righteousness, love, holiness, grace, etc. Peter has told us that this was possible only because the spirit of Christ was active in them, though never as indwelling permanently, until He, Christ, had come and gone on high after completing His work, 1 Pet. 1:11.

The Firstborn from the Dead (Col. 1:18). This title is linked with the previous one, the Beginning, signifying that only what exists in the power of resurrection will go through and endure for ever. All that is of the first, physical creation will be destroyed as described in 2 Peter 3:7,10,12; and recent scientific disclosures - as for instance the implications of solar eruptions and the possibility of the earth being struck by an asteroid - have made such an outcome seem eminently possible. Again, Christ's pre-eminence, this time in the resurrection world, is the prime thought.

The Head of all Principality and Power (Col. 2:10). This title links with chapter 1:18, but specifies Christ's supreme control of all powers both in heaven and on earth, perhaps particularly those in heavenly places,

emphasized because of the dangerous gnostic ideas as to angels. In Ephesians, Paul enlarges somewhat on these heavenly powers, as in 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers (authorities, JND)". It is a remarkable thought that these evil angelic powers are permitted so much latitude by God, seeing that Christ the Lord is the One with supreme control over them if He chose to exercise it. Peter presents a similar thought when he writes of Christ, "who is gone into heaven....angels and powers being made subject unto Him", 1 Pet. 3:22.