

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2026: *Uniting Heaven and Earth: Christ in Philipians and Colossians*

Lesson 8 “The Preeminence of Christ”

Read for this week’s study

Genesis 1:26, 27; Colossians. 1:15–20; John 1:1–3; Ephesians 1:22; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Romans 6:3, 4.

Memory Text

“He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:15–17, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Image of the Invisible God
- III. Firstborn Over All Creation
- IV. Head of the Body (the Church)
- V. The “Beginning” (and Initiator)
- VI. To Reconcile All Things
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “This week we will look at one of the most comprehensive and sublime statements about Jesus in the New Testament. What does it mean that Jesus is ‘the image of the invisible God,’ yet also ‘the firstborn over all creation’ (Col. 1:15, NIV)?” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. If we want to understand, appreciate and apply Paul’s writing to Colossians in the 1st century AD, we need to do some **exegesis**. Exegesis is a word of Greek origin (*ex ageó*) and it means “to lead out”, from which “interpretation” is derived. The basic question in exegesis is, “What did the author mean?” Exegesis is a process in which we seek the **intention** of the author. If we miss that step and start with the question: “What does the text mean for me/us?”, it almost guarantees a misunderstanding.
3. The “Colossian heresy” refers to a mix of false teachings that the Apostle Paul addresses in his letter to the Colossians that was circulating in the early Christian community at Colossae in the first century. While Paul does not describe it

systematically, the content of his warnings gives us clues about its nature. The false teachers did not *deny* the importance of Christ. They would simply *dethrone* him. In their teaching/philosophy, Christ was just one of many “emanations” that proceeded from God and through which people could reach God. (The false teachings also included: worship of angels, rigid ascetic practices, strict observation of the Jewish torah. This all resulted in spiritual elitism rooted in “secret knowledge” and legalistic righteousness.)

4. Sunday’s lesson focuses on Jesus being the image of the invisible God (1:15). No one has ever seen God (John 1:18), but in Jesus God has come near to us and become one of us. What is the connection with the image in Genesis 1:26-27 & Hebrews 1:3 (cf. John 14:9)? What do we realize about God’s character the more we look at Jesus? How does this lead to gratefulness (Colossians 1:3, 12)?
5. How are we to understand that Jesus is the “firstborn of all creation”? (Monday’s lesson) The title “firstborn” is used five times in relation to Jesus (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18, Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5). Why is this a significant Christological title (cf. Luke 2:7)? Which texts help us understand how this is used in the Semitic culture? (Psalm 89:20, 27 cf. 1 Samuel 16:10-12; Exodus 4:22 cf. Genesis 25:25-26; Jeremiah 31:9 cf. Genesis 41:50-52; Hebrews 12:23). As a title, “firstborn” refers not necessarily to time but to rank (“first lady”).
6. What does it mean that Christ “is the head of the body, the church” (1:18)? (Tuesday’s lesson) Based on English and some other languages, most people assume that “head” means ‘boss’, ‘authority’, ‘ruler’. But in Greek and in the context of 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians (1:22; 4:15; 5:23) and Colossians (1:18; 2:19), he is *life source* and *servant-provider*. Christ is the source of the Church’s cohesion as in him “all things hold together” (1:17). He is the source of the church’s life by virtue of his resurrection (“firstborn from the dead”; 1:18). Headship is defined as a function of the servant-provider also in 2:19. He makes the cohesion and growth of the body (community of believers) possible.
7. Wednesday’s lesson connects Jesus as the “*arche*” (beginning and initiator) of creation and church and resurrection [=new creation] (1:18). How are these ideas corelated? Especially in light of the fact that the teachers believed that matter is evil and Jesus did not have a proper body (he only “appeared” to be human).
8. Thursday’s lesson highlights the fact that Jesus “reconciled all things” (1:19-20). Just as verse 16 explains the appropriateness of what was said about Christ in v. 15, so verses 19-20 explain the appropriateness of 18b (‘who is the beginning’). Explore the richness of the various aspects of this. Why is it significant that “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things”, thus there was no reluctance or coercion in God? Paul uses “fulness” (*pleroma*) eight times in this letter which dwelled (more than resided) in Christ permanently.
9. This poem (1:15-20) gives the church not merely an exalted and larger view of Jesus and humanity, but also of God and his world. They all need to be understood in relation to Jesus Christ. How does this poem help us better understand the church’s

task in the world? What is the task of evangelism? How can we help create conditions so that human beings and the whole world can live as God always intended?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

What is your favorite verse to show that Christ is divine? What I've found most useful is Hebrews, in Hebrews 1. One reason for mentioning this tonight is that tying Hebrews 1 in with Romans 1 that we discussed a while ago, I think it's a very strong argument for the divinity of Christ. Hebrews 1 that begins:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us not by prophets, but by a son [In fact, the Greek is not the son but by a son as compared with prophets. But who is the son who came?].

To what angel [verse 5] did God ever say, "Thou art my son today I have begotten thee"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? And again when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

God asked the angels to worship His son. What about those who believe that the son was a created being? Does Paul say anything about those who worship a created being? Do you remember in Romans 1? What about those who turn from the truth and worship a creature rather than the creator. Romans 1:24, it's one of the explanations as to why God has given people up, for they won't respond to the truth. Romans 1:25 says, "He gives them up because they have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and have worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forevermore."

And sometimes with our good Witness friends, I like to ask what their attitude is toward Christ, do they worship Him? If He's a created being they shouldn't, right? And some of them say very sincerely, "Well, we don't worship Christ because one should not worship a created being." Then you turn over to Hebrews 1, the verse we just read, God said to His angels, even, that they should worship the Son. Then if God told the angels to worship the Son, that surely was recognizing the Son as God, not a created being, but the creator Himself. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 9, recorded December 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/17MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/18MMROMANS66> (Part 2)

Graham: Ah. He died in our stead. He died as the substitution. In a way, it's very true. I mean, either He dies or we die. However, that's where the comparison ends, because if God has let you and me and all other sinners die, all it would have done is prove the truthfulness of His warning, "If you sin, you will die." And God could say to the universe, "Was I right? I said sinners would die, and look, they're dead." But the universe would not have had answers to questions two and three that I just mentioned. When Jesus died, there was no doubt in the minds of the universe that God was not killing His Son. They were clear about that. And the death of Christ answers all those three questions. So, it's not either us or Him. His death was infinitely more significant than ours. But had He not died, then what else could God do but leave us to reap the consequences and we all would have died. So in a sense, yes. He died in our stead, but beyond that there's no comparison.

Lou: But not as a payoff. It's not one or the other.

Graham: It's not His death is equal to all of ours. His death is infinitely more significant than the death of every sinful man or angel who has ever lived. The death of angels and men would not have answered the questions. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #8 with Lou Venden, "The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence" recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/8MMCAG>*

If the one who came was not really God, then all we've said goes down the drain. Do you mean he was the firstborn of all creation? Then we don't know about God. Someone very kind was willing to come, or maybe he made him come, to clear up these matters. What do you do with the "firstborn of all creation"? I'd really want to put with that verse 18, "He's the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead," firstborn, "that in everything he might be pre-eminent." Is that how he's firstborn? Firstborn doesn't mean the first one born, necessarily, but the first in position, in rank, and in authority.

For example, Isaac was Abraham's firstborn, his only-begotten son. But he'd had a boy before, hadn't he? But he didn't inherit the estate. So this is in that sense of rank and position. Isn't this whole passage here in Colossians 1 to the effect that the one who came has never had a beginning. He's the first. He's the creator of all things. And didn't John say the same? Nothing was created without him. And Hebrews 1 is going to say God told the angels to worship him, and you don't worship a created being.

And I think that Paul's great concern here in Colossians is that the one who came to clear up all the questions about God was God himself, or our questions have not really been answered. Because our questions are not about the second in command. They're not about an angel. Our

questions are about God. So those who believe that someone less than God came have either different questions or they don't have the answers.

But if we really want to know about God, what God is really like, then it would mean everything in the world to believe and understand that the one who came to this earth and walked among us was that God. And so, when Jesus was here, and we realize it's God, and you watch him treat sinners so graciously, did anybody intercede with Jesus to forgive somebody? No. Nobody had to plead with him to forgive, ever. It was in his heart to forgive. No one had to plead with him. But somebody has to plead with the Father, right? If Jesus is fully God, as emphasized in all these passages, and nobody had to intercede with him, then we know no one has to intercede with God. And yet they weren't getting that point. And so Jesus had to say, in John 16:26, "You know that if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. And you realize the implications of this? There's no need for me to intercede with the Father when I get up there, for the Father's just like me. In fact, I am God."

What about Isaiah 9:6? What are the names of the Son, but the "everlasting Father, the almighty God," you remember? So on this earth, the angels saw God, "than whom there is none greater," treating people the way he did. And nobody had to plead with Jesus to forgive. So if we suggest somebody needs to plead with the Father but not with the Son, we've driven a wedge between the two, or we suggest, maybe, the Son is not fully God. Whatever God did for sinners, I mean God the Son, God the Father would do, for they are equally God. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Ephesians and Colossians*, recorded May 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/67MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/68MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

Man was the crowning act of the creation of God, made in the image of God, and designed to be a counterpart of God; but Satan has labored to obliterate the image of God in man, and to imprint upon him his own image. Man is very dear to God, because he was formed in His own image. {LHU 48.2}

When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27), and it was His purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal this image—the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator. All his faculties were capable of development; their capacity and vigor were continually to increase. Vast was the scope offered for their exercise, glorious the field opened to their research. The mysteries of the visible universe—the "wondrous works of Him which is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16)—invited man's study. Face-to-face, heart-to-heart

communion with his Maker was his high privilege. Had he remained loyal to God, all this would have been his forever. Throughout eternal ages he would have continued to gain new treasures of knowledge, to discover fresh springs of happiness, and to obtain clearer and yet clearer conceptions of the wisdom, the power, and the love of God. More and more fully would he have fulfilled the object of his creation, more and more fully have reflected the Creator's glory. {Ed 15.1}

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. {Ed 17.2}

Next to the angelic beings, the human family, formed in the image of God, are the noblest of His created works. God desires them to become all that He has made it possible for them to be, and to do their very best with the powers He has given them. {MH 397.1}

In the creation of man was manifest the agency of a personal God. When God had made man in His image, the human form was perfect in all its arrangements, but it was without life. Then a personal, self-existing God breathed into that form the breath of life, and man became a living, intelligent being. All parts of the human organism were set in action. The heart, the arteries, the veins, the tongue, the hands, the feet, the senses, the faculties of the mind, all began their work, and all were placed under law. Man became a living soul. Through Christ the Word, a personal God created man and endowed him with intelligence and power. {MH 415.1}

Above all lower orders of being, God designed that man, the crowning work of His creation, should express His thought and reveal His glory. {MH 415.3}

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed. . . . In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father. {TMK 338.4}

Christ's favorite theme was the paternal character and abundant love of God. This knowledge of God was Christ's own gift to men, and this gift He has committed to His people to be communicated by them to the world. {6T 55.1}

Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, a God of mercy, tenderness, and compassion. By the world's Redeemer the thick darkness with which Satan had enshrouded the throne of the Deity was swept away, and the Father was again manifest to men as the Light of life. . . . {HP 8.3}

In word and in deed the Messiah, during His earthly ministry, was to reveal to mankind the glory of God the Father. Every act of His life, every word spoken, every miracle wrought, was to make known to fallen humanity the infinite love of God. {PK 696.3}

Satan had clothed the Father in his own attributes, but Christ represented Him in His true character of benevolence and love. In the character in which Christ presented Him to the world it was as if He gave a new gift to man. . . . {LHU 36.4}

Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men.—SC 11 (1892). {1MCP 250.1}

The Sun of Righteousness did not burst upon the world in splendor, to dazzle the senses with His glory. It is written of Christ, “His going forth is prepared as the morning.” Hosea 6:3. Quietly and gently the daylight breaks upon the earth, dispelling the shadow of darkness, and waking the world to life. So did the Sun of Righteousness arise, “with healing in His wings.” Malachi 4:2. {DA 261.3}

Through creation and redemption, through nature and through Christ, the glories of the divine character are revealed. By the marvelous display of His love in giving “His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” the character of God is revealed to the intelligences of the universe. Through Christ our heavenly Father is made known as the God of love. {ST, December 15, 1914 par. 5}

The life of Christ established a religion in which there is no caste, a religion by which Jew and Gentile, free and bond, are linked in a common brotherhood, equal before God. No question of policy influenced His movements. He made no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. That which appealed to His heart was a soul thirsting for the waters of life. {9T 191.1}

He passed no human being by as worthless, but sought to apply the healing remedy to every soul. In whatever company He found Himself, He presented a lesson appropriate to the time and the circumstances. Every neglect or insult shown by men to their fellow men only made Him more conscious of their need of His divine-human sympathy. He sought to inspire with hope the roughest and most unpromising, setting before them the assurance that they might become blameless and harmless, attaining such a character as would make them the children of God. {9T 191.2}

Christ came to this world to show that by receiving power from on high, man can live an unsullied life. With unwearying patience and sympathetic helpfulness He met men in their necessities. By the gentle touch of grace He banished from the soul unrest and doubt, changing enmity to love, and unbelief to confidence. {MH 25.1}

When the Christian takes his baptismal vow, divine help is pledged to him. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit stand ready to work in his behalf. God places at his command the resources of

heaven, that he may be an overcomer. His own power is small; but God is omnipotent, and God is his helper. Daily he is to make known his wants at the throne of grace. By faith and trust, by availing himself of the resources provided, he can be more than a conqueror. {OHC 157.5}

The rabbis had a saying that there is rejoicing in heaven when one who has sinned against God is destroyed; but Jesus taught that to God the work of destruction is a strange work. That in which all heaven delights is the restoration of God's own image in the souls whom He has made. {COL 190.1}

Satan was exulting that he had succeeded in debasing the image of God in humanity. Then Jesus came to restore in man the image of his Maker. . . . He came to expel the demons that had controlled the will. He came to lift us up from the dust, to reshape the marred character after the pattern of His divine character, and make it beautiful with His own glory.—DA 36-38. {TA 180.3}

Through the gospel, souls that are degraded and enslaved by Satan are to be redeemed to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. God's purpose is not merely to deliver from the suffering that is the inevitable result of sin, but to save from sin itself. . . . Eternity alone can reveal the glorious destiny to which man, restored to God's image, may attain. {MB 60.3}