

New Hope Sermon The Nine Absolutes of Christ – Col. 1:15-21

In our pluralistic world, believing the truths in our passage today is very radical. This section in Col.1:15-21 could be called the 9 absolutes of Christ. But nothing is accepted as absolute in our secular world today with its God of tolerance. Yet, our context is much like that of the Apostle Paul. In his day there was also an extraordinary plurality of religions. And pressure that everyone in society adhere to these gods. David Wells in his recent article entitled “No Place for Truth,” says:

“The pluralism and the paganism of our time were the common experience of the prophets and apostles. In Mesopotamia, there were thousands of gods and goddesses, many of which were known to the Israelites--indeed, sometimes known too well. ... Nothing, therefore, could be more remarkable than to hear the contention... that the existence of religious pluralism today makes belief in the uniqueness of Christianity quite impossible. *David Wells in No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology? Christianity Today, Vol. 38, no. 8.*

How does Jesus stack up against all the other gods in Biblical times and today? This is a real question for millions around the world.

Author Frederica Mathewes-Greene describes the issue in her own life:

When I was around eight or nine, I went through a spurt of having very strong faith. My parents didn't think it was entirely healthy to be that religious. When I'd say that I wanted to be a nun (because we didn't know of any other way of giving your whole life to Christ), they said that was neurotic and that I was running away from life. So I got the message that it wasn't good to be too religious.

When I was 12 or 13, I began to doubt the entire Christian story. I felt almost as if I'd had somebody try to cheat me. They had fed me this long, complex story about virgin birth, born in a manger, died on a cross, came back to life. It just sounded preposterous to me. I thought that it was something that no normal, sane person could be expected to believe, and I'd been made a fool. I began then to consider atheism, agnosticism, and various other religions. But I rejected Christianity with vehemence. Initially I chose Hinduism because it seemed to me the most intriguing and colorful of all the different world religions.

[What ultimately led me out of Hinduism and back to Christianity again] was a strange experience. I was with my husband on our honeymoon, hitchhiking around Europe. He was an atheist who had been assigned in one of his classes to read a gospel. And he kept saying, "There's something about Jesus. I've never encountered anyone like this before. I know that he's speaking the truth. I'm an atheist. But if Jesus says there's a God, there must be a God." It was a very scary experience for me, because I didn't want him to be a Christian. He was not ready to make a full commitment to Christ at that point, but he was curious and wanted to study more. [Then in Dublin] I walked into a church... In a corner of the church there was a small altar with a white marble statue that showed Jesus' heart exposed on his chest with flames coming out of the top and thorns wrapped around the heart. As I was looking at this, I suddenly realized that I was on my knees. And as if a radio inside of me suddenly clicked on, I could hear a voice. I didn't hear it with my ears, but it was like a presence that filled me. The voice said, "I am your life. You thought that your life was your history, your name, your personality. You thought that your life was the fact that your heart beats. But that is not your life. I am your life. I am the foundation of everything else in your life." It was pretty incontrovertible who it was that was speaking to me... .

I started reading the Bible, and I found that I just disagreed with Jesus about a lot of things. But something had happened to me in that church in which I realized that I didn't know everything about the world.

Gradually we both were able to come into faith. It was several months later that a friend of ours said, "Well, have you ever given your hearts to Jesus? Have you ever asked Jesus to be your Lord?" Our response was, "We're not Southern Baptists." Our association with that kind of talk is that you have to be Southern Baptist for Jesus to be your Lord.

He said, "Actually, it's for everybody."

We said, "Well, you know, we're in graduate school."

"No, even for you."

So the three of us knelt down together and prayed and asked Jesus to be our Lord, having no idea what that would mean but wanting so much to find out. *"The Dick Staub Interview: Frederica Mathewes-Greene," ChristianityToday.com, (10-1-02)*

So, what does it mean to say Jesus is Lord and believe His 9 absolutes?

One way to answer that is to compare who Jesus is with the 9 basic questions in every worldview:

1. Is there a prime reality? What is the "really real"?
2. Who or what are we? What does it mean to be a human being?
3. Is there such a thing as "morality," right and wrong? If so, what is its basis; how does one know the good and the bad?
4. What is the meaning of history? Or, is there any meaning?
5. What is wrong with us? Something is off—what is it?
6. Is there a solution; can things be fixed? By whom? How? How quickly?
7. Is there a God? If so, can this God be known? And is this God involved in the world, especially relative to human suffering?
8. What happens to a human being at death?
9. What time is it? "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven" ([Eccles 3:1](#)). Where are we in the flow of history? (*Darrell W. Johnson, [The Glory of Preaching](#) (InterVarsity, 2009), 67-68;*

How does Paul's description of Jesus answer those questions? What are His nine superiorities? V.15-18:

1. He is the image of the invisible God
2. He is the firstborn of all creation
3. All things were created by him in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities - -that is a n all-encompassing claim!!
4. He is preeminent – before all things
5. In Him all things (everything, everything in creation) holds together
6. He is the head of the body, the church
7. He is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead

Then Paul adds 2 more superiorities: v.19-22

8. All the fullness of God dwells in him – He is deity
9. He is the reconciler of all things with God – having made peace by the blood of His cross.

How does Christ measure up against these 9 basic issues that face every human being on the planet?

#1. Is there a prime reality? – Christ as Creator is that prime reality. He created all things and is preeminent over all things.

#5 +6 – something off with humans. Is there a solution? The “off” would be the alienation between humans and God and humans and one another. Jesus came to reconcile each part – us to God and us to one another and He did it by his sacrificial death.

#7 – Is there a God? Can this God be known? V. 15 Jesus is the image of the invisible God. v. 8 all the fullness of the deity dwells in Him. He is the firstborn of creation – becoming human so we could understand and know God.

#8 Does this God understand suffering – what has He done about it? Jesus became a human and died in our place making peace through His blood. His was the ultimate suffering in bearing our sins and being separated from God.

#8 – what happens to a human being at death? He is the firstborn from the dead and can now give that life to all who believe in Him.

So Jesus is the bottom line reality and answer to the basic questions of all religions. This is true, Biblically and true experientially. But if that is true, we have to ask: what difference does this Jesus make in daily life?

Let's go over the list again:

10. He is the image of the invisible God

11. He is the firstborn of all creation

12. All things were created by him in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities - -that is an all-encompassing claim!!

13. He is preeminent – before all things

14. In Him all things (everything, everything in creation) holds together

15. He is the head of the body, the church

16. He is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead

Then Paul adds 2 more superiorities: v.19-22

17. All the fullness of God dwells in him – He is deity

18. He is the reconciler of all things with God – having made peace by the blood of His cross.

Practically, this means:

He is your Creator

He made you – every aspect of you. He said it is good. He loves and cherishes you and is committed to your care as your creator

He reveals the character and heart of God. He makes God knowable and approachable. As I read the gospels I understand the love of God, the mercy of God, the forgiveness of God, the wisdom of God.

He is the One who is preeminent before all things. As I face the evil in the world all around and see that evil so often unchecked, even abounding in its destruction and oppression of people, I know that Jesus Christ has taken the power of that evil away – He defeated all evil forces on the cross and in his resurrection.

He is the One who holds the universe together by the Word of His power. If He can keep the universe together – when each atom in the universe has the inbuilt drive to burst apart, He can hold my life together.

He is the head of the church. He is the One who has the agenda, the cohesion, the love we need to be a true family.

The reconciler of all things with God through his death of the cross, He is the One who can bring true peace to the world and to fractious relationships between peoples.

In short, He is the One I can fully trust. I can surrender my life to the sufficiency of Christ and know that He is able to do anything. Plus, He is the One with the global agenda I want to be on. In salvation we become His masterpiece, showing His reality to the world through our good works. He has a plan, the only plan with eternal fruit and significance. And since he is preeminent above all things, He is able to bring that plan to fruition. He alone gives our lives cosmic significance and eternal value. Christ alone can give forgiveness, a new heart, peace, hope, power and value. He is the pearl of great price that we give up everything to possess, as he possesses us. To Him, we surrender all. So let's sing: "I surrender all". Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 7/1/18