

The Pre-eminence of Christ in the Church Colossians 1:18

INTRO: Our subject today is one of the most important and at the same time misunderstood subjects of our time.

The desire of this pastor is to be faithful to the Word of God on this subject. I am not interested in winning the most popular preacher contest, but I am interested in faithfully, rightfully dividing the Word of Truth.

Friends, there are some things that have set Baptists apart from others throughout the centuries: the doctrine of the church is one of those things.

Let me say at the outset of this message, Baptists are not Protestant. Baptists did not come out of the reformation; we came through it. Christ established His church during His earthly ministry.

“Alexander Campbell (Disciple or church of Christ): ‘The Baptists can trace their origin to Apostolic times and can produce unequivocal testimony of their existence in every century down to the present time’ (Debate with Walker).”

“John C. Ridpath (Methodist): ‘I should not readily admit that there was a Baptist *church* as far back as A.D. 100, though without doubt there were Baptists then, as all Christians were then Baptist’ (quoted from W. A. Jarrell, *Baptist Church Perpetuity*, p. 59).”

“Mosheim (Lutheran): ‘The first century was a history of the Baptists.’”

“Cardinal Hosius (Roman Catholic): ‘If the truth of religion were to be judged by the readiness and cheerfulness which a man of any sect shows in suffering, then the opinions and persuasions of *no sect can be truer or surer* than those of the Anabaptists; since there have been none for *these twelve hundred years past* that have been more grievously punished’ (quoted from G. H. Orchard, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists*, p. 364).”(p. 162).

There are several points that are made in Colossians 1:18 concerning Christ:

1. He is the head of the church.
2. He is the beginning of the church.
3. He is the firstborn from among the dead.
4. He has the supremacy in all things.

I. HE IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH

A. The Scripture plainly declares who the head of the New Testament church is: “And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church. . . .”

1. Just as man is the head of the wife. Ephesians 5:23, “For

the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. . . .” Christ is the head of the church.

- a. Here, and in our text, the Bible tells us that the church is Christ’s body.
 - b. My wife is a local, visible wife, and I am according to Scripture, her head. I am not head of a universal, invisible wife! And Christ is not the head of a universal, invisible church.
2. To the church at Corinth, Paul wrote: “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (I Cor 12:27). The books of First and Second Corinthians were written to the visible church at Corinth (I Cor 1:2; II Cor 1:1). The body of Christ is local and visible.
 3. Of this body, the local visible church, William Hendriksen says: “Those therefore, who in their ecumenical zeal are anxious to erase all denominational boundaries and create a mammoth super church find no comfort here” (182).
- B. To more fully understand what is being taught here, we must know what the word church means. When we study the etymology of the word church, we find that it is a word used long before the writing of the New Testament. In Classical Greek and in the Septuagint the word always and only meant “assembly.” Nothing else.
1. In the New Testament, the word for church is the same as in Classical Greek and in the Septuagint. It is the word *ekklesia* meaning assembly.
 2. Dr. George Ricker Berry, Greek scholar, in his discussions on New Testament synonyms points out that “the Greek word *synagoga* means an assembly such as a ‘mass of people gathered together;’ but the Greek word *ekklesia* is a narrower word, also an assembly, but including only those specially called out of a larger multitude, for the transaction of business”(Cross 12).
 3. What Dr. Berry says is true and makes perfect sense when you understand the meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia*. This word is actually a composite word combining two separate Greek words: *kaleo*- “to call” and *ek*- “out.” So *ekklesia* means “to call out.”
 - a. An *ekklesia* is a called out assembly.
 - b. Not only is this a called out assembly; it is an

assembly called out for a purpose.

4. Dr. B. H. Carroll, born in Carrollton, Mississippi, noted Baptist scholar, in his book *Ecclesia: The Church* says concerning the meaning of the word *ekklesia*: “It’s primary meaning is: an organized assembly, whose members have been properly called out from private homes or businesses to attend to public affairs. This definition necessarily implies prescribed conditions of membership. This meaning, substantially, applies. . . . to the New Testament *ekklesia*” (Entzminger 20).
 5. Even when the word church, *ekklesia*, is used in the institutional sense, it means a local, visible body. Joe T. Odle, late editor of the Baptist Record, said: “When the word ‘church’ is used of an institution, it does not mean one big universal church, but an institution made up of individual churches. When we speak of ‘the home’ or ‘the school,’ we do not mean one big universal home or school. Nor is there one big church. The New Testament never speaks of a group of churches as ‘the church,’ nor are the words ‘universal’ or ‘invisible’ used with reference to the church anywhere in the New Testament” (14).
 6. The Catholics gave the world the Universal Invisible Church, and the Protestants gave the world the Universal Visible church. Baptists believe in a local, visible church.
- C. “Christ is the head of the body, the church.”
1. The local church is the body of Christ. It is the organism through which He acts. The great commission was given to the church, the local body (Mt 28:19-20).
 - a. In I Cor. 12:27, we read: “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” The words that we have just read were written to “the church of God which is at Corinth.” The local, visible church is the body of Christ.
 - b. A long list of scriptures can be given to show that the local church is the body of Christ (Rm 12:5; Eph 1:22-23; Eph 5:29-30; Col 1:24).
 2. Each local church is under the authority of its head; just as the wife is under her head.
 3. Without Christ as head, the church will not have divine direction.

4. Without Christ, the church cannot think truth.

II. THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

- A. The Greek word for “beginning” is *arche* meaning, “origin, the beginning, the source, the person or thing that commences, that by which anything begins to be.”
- B. Christ established His church during His personal ministry on earth.
 - 1. Christ definitely said He would do this (Mt 16:18 “...upon this rock I will build....”).
 - 2. The first members of the church were the apostles (I Cor 12:28 “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles. . . .”).
 - a. Jesus took the apostles, all baptized by John the Baptist (Acts 1:22), and formed them into His church.
 - b. Note in Acts 1:15 that on the Day of Pentecost three thousand were saved and baptized, and added to the church. The local, visible church was in existence before Pentecost.

III. HE IS THE FIRST BORN FROM THE DEAD

- A. Jesus Christ rose to die no more.
 - 1. The triumphant bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the pillar of the Christian faith.
 - 2. Jesus said: “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Jn 14:19).
- B. He utterly defeated the enemy, the opposing forces (II Tim 1:9-10).

IV. HE HAS SUPREMACY IN ALL THINGS

- A. Through the resurrection, Jesus Christ holds the right to the title of Sovereign Lord.
- B. He is Lord of creation, the Head of and origin of the church. He is the perfect substitute who died, was buried, and rose again. He is Sovereign in the realm of redemption.

CONCLUSION: Ephesian 3:21, “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.”

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