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“Jesus Is”

Colossians 1:15–18

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There are many thoughts and perceptions about who Jesus is. Different people believe different things about Him. Each world religion presents Him differently. But what does the Bible say? Who is Jesus according to Scripture? In this study of Colossians 1:15–18, we share five points about Jesus’ true identity and contrast Him with other world religions.

1. **Colossians 1:15–18** – “[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. [16] 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. [17] And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. [18] And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

2. Context

a. The prevalence of confusion

i. Our culture is attempting to redefine words.

1. Our culture tries to redefine what pronouns apply to a person, what marriage is, what a woman or man are, which biological sex can give birth, and when life begins.
2. These attempts to oppose Biblical truth lead to moral confusion.
3. When asked to define what a woman is in her confirmation hearing, one of our sitting supreme court justices said, “I’m not a biologist.”

ii. Satan is the author of confusion.

1. Satan is behind today’s gender confusion and is also sowing spiritual confusion about who Jesus is.
2. Just as people ignore truth and redefined the basics to suit their personal preferences, they do the same with Jesus.
 - a. The Qur’an, the Book of Mormon, the Watchtower Society, and the Hadith present Jesus in a multitude of different ways which do not align with the Bible.
 - b. Modern society believes in a Jesus that accepts their lifestyles, gets them out of trouble, helps them get rich quick, and applauds their choices.
3. **DISCUSS:** Who do you look for clarity in a world of confusion? How do you find out what is true?

3. Who is Jesus?

- a. The true Jesus is revealed in Scripture.
 - i. The Bible predates all other religious texts that include Jesus.
 - ii. The Bible passes the highest scrutiny of all ancient manuscripts.
 - iii. The Bible is the best-selling, most widely read, and most-often-stolen book of all time.
 - iv. The Bible has one author—God—but He used over 40 men on three continents writing in three languages over a period of 1,500 years to compile His love letter to the world.
 - v. Despite the many human scribes involved, the Bible harmoniously communicates the one story of God’s love for us revealed in Jesus.
- b. Colossians 1:15-18 outlines at least five points regarding who Jesus is.
 - i. The Image of God (**Colossians 1:15**).
 - ii. The Creator of all things (**Colossians 1:16**).
 - iii. The One who is before all things (**Colossians 1:17**).
 - iv. The Head of the body—the church (**Colossians 1:18a**).
 - v. The Firstborn from the dead (**Colossians 1:18b**).

4. Jesus, the Image of God (verse 15)

- a. Many heretical views claim to have been introduced by angels or are tied to misconceptions about angels.
 - i. A heresy was circulating in the church at Colosse claiming that angels were necessary mediators between God and man.
 - ii. Some in Colosse went so far as to worship angels.
 1. **Colossians 2:18a** – *“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels.”*
 - iii. Many false religions claim to have begun by some inspiration or mediation of angels.
 1. Fallen angels, also called demons, are interested in introducing a false gospel.
 - a. Islam began when Muhammad said he received visions from an angel he claimed was Gabriel.
 - b. Mormonism began when Joseph Smith said he received golden tablets from the angel Moroni.
 - c. Jehovah’s Witnesses claim Jesus is the archangel, Michael.
 2. **Galatians 1:8** – *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”*
- b. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man.

- i. Angels are real and powerful beings that we cannot see unless they reveal themselves to us, but they are not mediators.
 - 1. **Hebrews 13:2** – *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”* (ESV)
 - 2. **1 Timothy 2:5** – *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”*
- ii. **DISCUSS:** The human heart is perpetually creating idols. How do you avoid falling for a Jesus replacement?
- c. Jesus is superior to angels.
 - i. Paul called Jesus the *“image of the invisible God”* to show Jesus is greater than the angels and is the only true mediator (verse 15).
- d. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God.
 - i. The word *“image,” eikon* in the Greek, means *“manifestation, revelation, or reflection.”*
 - 1. **DISCUSS:** What are some ways Jesus has helped you draw closer to the heart of the Triune God?
 - ii. **John 14:8–9** – Philip, one of Jesus’ disciples, *“[8] said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ [9] Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”*
 - 1. Jesus claimed to be God in flesh.
 - iii. **John 10:30–33** – Jesus said, *“[30] ‘I and My Father are one.’ [31] Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. [32] Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?’ [33] The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.’”*
 - 1. Some try to interpret this as Jesus claiming to be like God, but we know that is not the case because in the next few verses, the Jews accused Him of blasphemy and tried to stone Him.
 - 2. The word *“one”* is the Greek word **hen**, meaning *“one in essence and nature.”*
 - 3. Jesus was telling the Jews that He is God, and that is why they tried to stone Him for blasphemy.
 - iv. **Hebrews 1:3a** – *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”* (1984 NIV)
 - 1. Jesus becomes visible so the invisible God is made manifest.
- e. Jesus is God, yet major world religions deny this and try to redefine Him.
 - i. Muslims believe Jesus is a prophet inferior to Muhammad.

1. Yet the Qur'an shows Jesus in a more miraculous light than Muhammad.
 - a. Surah 3:47 says Jesus was born of a virgin.
 - b. Surah 6:85 says Jesus is sinless.
 - c. Surah 3:45 says Jesus is the Messiah.
 - d. Surah 3:49 says Jesus performed miracles.
 - e. Surah 4:157–158 says Jesus ascended to heaven in bodily form.
 2. Muhammad did none of these things.
 - ii. Mormons believe Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer.
 - iii. Jehovah's Witnesses demote Jesus to the level of an angel.
5. Jesus, the Creator of all things (verse 16)
- a. **Genesis 1:1** – *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*
 - i. The word “God” is the plural word **Elohim**.
 1. The Hebrew for “God” in **Genesis 1:1** is **'Ēlōhîm**, a masculine plural noun.
 2. The Hebrew for “created” in verse 1 is **bārā'**, a masculine singular verb.
 3. Singular verbs do not modify plural nouns in ancient Hebrew.
 - a. This means **Genesis 1:1** is not a grammatical error, but an indication that God is representing Himself as a plurality.
 - b. The Bible reveals that there is one God expressed in three persons. This concept is called the Trinity and includes God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
 - b. **Genesis 1:26–27** – *“[26] Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ [27] So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”*
 - i. God revealed Himself as a plurality from the beginning.
 1. **Genesis 1:26** uses the plural pronouns “Us” and “Our” for God.
 2. But **Genesis 1:27** uses the singular pronouns “He” and “His” for God.
 - ii. God is one God represented in three co-eternal, co-equal persons.
 1. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct in role but one in essence and nature.
 - c. Jesus is not part of creation; He's the Creator.
 - i. **Hebrews 1:1–2** – *“[1] In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, [2] but in these last*

days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” (1984 NIV)

- ii. **Colossians 1:16** and **Genesis 1:1** are prooftexts that Jesus is the person of the Godhead who created the world.

6. Jesus, the One who is before all things (verse 17)

a. Defining “before”

- i. The Greek word for “before” is **pro**.
- ii. In the Greek, “before all things” can be translated to have two different meanings depending on the context.
 - 1. It can mean above all things (pointing to Christ’s supremacy) or existing before all things (pointing to His pre-existence).
 - 2. Both meanings apply to Jesus and both meanings are true.
 - a. Jesus is “preeminent,” supreme over all (verse 18).
 - b. Jesus is also pre-existent, or co-eternal (Genesis 1:1).
 - c. These are prooftexts that Jesus is God.
 - 3. **DISCUSS**: Are you treating Christ as preeminent in your life? What are some ways that you recenter when you realize your priorities were not rightly ordered?

b. **John 8:56–59** – “[56] ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.’ [57] Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ [58] Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’ [59] Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.”

- i. Jesus told a skeptical crowd that He is the I AM, making a claim to divinity.
 - 1. This phrase was a reference to when God appeared to Moses as a burning bush and identified Himself the I AM in **Exodus 3**.
 - 2. “I AM” comes from the Hebrew root word “to be,” and it is where we get the name of God, **Yahweh**, the self-existent One.
 - 3. This verb means “I was, I am, and I always will be.”
 - 4. **DISCUSS**: How have you experienced Jesus remain the same faithful God throughout your Christian life?
- ii. The Jews understood that Jesus was claiming to be God, and in their unbelief, they tried to stone Him for blasphemy.

7. Jesus, the Head of the body—the church (verse 18a)

- a. Jesus is the Lord and should be the only one in command of the church.
 - i. A pastor is only a shepherd of a local flock.
 - ii. All Believers should submit to the guidance of the Chief Shepherd.

1. **DISCUSS:** What does it mean to let Jesus be the Head of your church and of your life?
 - b. Local church bodies may differ, as physical bodies differ.
 - i. Just as the human body has many different parts (or members) with different roles, the church has many members (Believers) with different gifts and responsibilities that make up the body of Christ.
 - ii. Churches may have different cultures, preferences, and traditions, but every church body must be led by the Head, which is Jesus.
 1. Without Jesus as the Head, a church body is a lifeless corpse.
 2. **Ephesians 1:22–23** – “[22] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” (1984 NIV)
 - iii. **DISCUSS:** How are you serving the body of Christ with your God-given gifts?
8. Jesus, the Firstborn from the dead (verse 18b)
- a. Jesus is not the Firstborn from the dead because He was resurrected first.
 - i. God resurrected people in the Old Testament.
 1. In **1 Kings 17**, God used the prophet Elijah to raise the widow of Zarephath’s son.
 2. In **2 Kings 4**, He used the prophet Elisha to raise the Shunammite woman’s son.
 - ii. God resurrected people in the New Testament.
 1. In **Luke 17**, He raised the son of the widow of Nain.
 2. In **Mark 5**, He raised Jairus’ daughter.
 3. In **John 11**, He raised Lazarus.
 - b. Jesus is the Firstborn from the dead because He is the first and only one to stay alive in His glorified body after rising from the dead.
 - i. Jesus’ glorification promises that we, too, will be raised incorruptible.
 1. **1 Corinthians 15** uses the word “firstfruits” instead of “Firstborn.”
 - a. **1 Corinthians 15:20** – “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”
 2. The word “firstfruits” refers to an annual springtime Jewish feast in which Jews dedicated the first fruit of their harvest to the Lord.
 - a. The Jews did this, trusting that a harvest would follow.
 - b. This title for Jesus explains that He is the prototype, the firstfruits of the harvest to follow.

3. Those who have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins make up the harvest that will rise in glorified bodies and live with Jesus forever.
 - a. **Philippians 3:20-21** – “[20] Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (1984 NIV)

9. Jesus' identity

- a. Who is Jesus? He is Lord.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)