



Sermon – October 11, 2020  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Colossians 1:17 – 18*

*Hebrews 1:3*

*Colossians 2:9 – 10, 18 - 19*

As you grab your seats, let's pick up our Bibles. We're going to spend our time in Colossians 1:17 and 18 this morning. And while you're turning there, how about those Aggies? That was amazing. So Cami and I's first game together at Kyle Field was back in 2002 when the Aggies knocked off number one Oklahoma with Reggie McNeal. And now this past week, yesterday, it was the first time for my whole family to be there at Kyle Field since we moved here. And it was the first time we've knocked off a top five team since that game in 2002. So I figured my family has got something to do with that considering both of those dimensions. And if you're a guest with us this morning, whether you're just in town for the game weekend or this is your first time here or online, welcome home. We're glad you're here. We had an incredible time this Monday just past in our new member workshop where we had the chance to invest in those that are coming into the life of our family and help them get to know who we are, what we're about, and how they can connect. And we really highlighted the fact that we're a church committed to three things: the gospel, mission, and community. And that's what we're going to find when we come to Colossians 1 this morning. Just to remind you where we are, last week Wes helped us to center our hearts on the mission of God, His heart for the nations. In the week prior to that when we were in Colossians, we saw the supremacy of Christ in creation. And next week as we continue through this hymn that's right here in Colossians 1, we're going to see the supremacy of Christ in the new creation. But this morning, Paul bridges those two realities together. What Christ as done in creation, what He is doing in the new creation, and I want you to see the way that he says it right there beginning in verse 17 when he says this. Speaking of Jesus, he says this:

*<sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.*

Back in 2004, I was serving on the staff here at Central in the College Ministry. Cami and I were engaged and we had the opportunity, like many of you have over the years, to have Chris do our

premarital counseling. And he was investing in us and one of the assignments that he gave us was to go home and to write down 25 ways that your future spouse could show their love for you in the marriage relationship. So I filled out my long list of things. Cami filled out her long list of things. And as we came in to that next meeting with our pastor, I had this amazing idea come to me. This is perfect. I'm about to find out the key to how to love my wife for the rest of my life. She's going to give me these clues, these 25 things. And so I had this idea that I raised in front of my future wife and my pastor and I asked them this question. Hey, how would it work if I took these 25 things that Cami says will show her love and I made a spreadsheet out of them? And I tracked when I demonstrated those things to her along the way in the future. I could make sure I have interspersed each one at different times and in different ways and made sure that I showed her this love in all those ways. Now if you've been around Central long enough, how do you think Chris Osborne reacted to that? That's exactly what he did. He laughed me out of the room. And I quickly left that idea behind. But at the core of it, what I knew is something that we all feel. There are times where we believe if we can control the process, we can confirm the outcome. That's the way I felt in that moment. But so often we feel that way. If we can control the process, we can confirm the outcome. In other words, we want to be the one holding our lives together.

But Paul, in this passage, is giving us a different picture. What he's showing us this morning is that one of the most difficult lessons to learn in the Christian life is that it is not us, but Jesus who holds our life together. Now right here, we've got in verses 17 and 18 the centerpiece of this hymn, this poem, this Christological focus that Paul is giving at the start of his message. And as we look at this text this morning, we're going to find that Paul highlights two realities about Jesus that should reframe how we see our lives as believers. So notice the first one. It's right back there in verse 17. Paul emphasizes that Jesus holds the creation together. Jesus holds the creation together. Notice how he says it. He says, He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. He's highlighting the preeminence of Christ that's seen because He exists before all things. Now this is something he's already been talking about in verses 15 and 16. That Christ is preeminent; both in terms of time and significance. In His, that He preceded all things and that He is above all things. And he speaks there that He was before all things and before he says, in Him all things hold together. So what the picture that Paul is giving us here is not just of the preeminence of Christ, but the providence of Christ. That He is the one who is holding this world together. So what does that mean when he talks about holding all things together? What's the picture there? It's that of placing things together. Of fixing them, sustaining them, upholding them. Maybe if you wanted to look at it some other time you could turn to Hebrews 1:3 where the author of Hebrews says this about Jesus.

<sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of His power.

That's the picture Paul is giving here. Holding together. Of upholding all things. Now I'm a child of the 80's and the 90's and one of the things my mom was amazing at was using a hot glue gun. I know some of you women had those and have used them for decades. The hot glue gun only came out in times of deep need. When the tape couldn't hold it, the Elmer's couldn't keep it together. When there was a deep need for incredible sticking power, the glue gun came out. As a young child, I always wanted to find ways that I could get into the action to use that thing. Especially if I could use it against one of my brothers if they were bothering me. But you'd take

that little plastic tube and you'd put it into that hot cauldron and it would heat that thing up and inevitably you'd get, I'd get it right on my hand, but she would affix it perfectly every single time. It would take two things that were seemingly totally apart and bring them together. It was that glue that held them together. And if you were to go look at this term, holds together, in the original language, what you would find is that it carries the connotation of glue, of that sticking power. There's a sense in which what Jesus is saying is that, is that Paul is saying that Jesus is the glue that holds the world together. That's the picture that he's giving there. And so what does that look like? If Christ is the one holding all things together, it's a reminder to us that He is the sovereign Lord of the universe. And that's true when He's a baby lying in the manger. It's still true when He's a 12-year-old in the temple. It's still true when He is stapled to a Roman instrument of torture as a, perceived as an insurrectionist in resistance to the Roman empire. He is the one who is holding all things together. Every ocean tide. Every planetary orbit. Every gravitational pull. Every pulse of blood. Every job hunt. Every longing for a spouse. He is the one that holds all things together. See, Colossians 1:17 is not just referring to Christ's work in creation; but His ongoing work in providence. And what is the providence of God that we see Paul speaking of here? Well, the idea of providence is pictured in, at the intersection of where God's goodness and His greatness comes together. That He is for us and He is powerful enough to bring things about. That He sees the needs of the world and He meets them in a way that accomplishes His will so that He can receive the glory. See, what Paul is reminding us of here is that when it comes to creation, Jesus doesn't just shape it, but sustains it. He doesn't just create it, He controls it. He doesn't just make it, He maintains it. All things are held together by the Son of the living God. Yeah, I abandoned that effort to craft those spreadsheets as I headed into my marriage. But one thing I couldn't let go of was this verse, Colossians 1:17. Back in that day, we didn't have hashtags for our weddings, we didn't have getaway weekends for engagement parties, or a bachelor gathering. But we did have a theme verse for our wedding. And it was right here in Colossians 1:17. 15 years ago, Cami and I committed our lives before God saying to our Lord and Savior that we believe that You will hold all things together in our marriage. That if we keep Christ at the center, You will be faithful to sustain us through every high and every low. Through every place we've ever lived, every job we've ever experienced, this was a theme verse for us; clinging to the providence of God. And the call to each one of us this morning is to cling to that same reality ourselves. But let's have a reality check this morning. So often, we feel as if we live in a world that is out of control. In fact, that shouldn't surprise us because from Genesis 3 onward, it is. When sin enters into the world, it fractures the universe. And there is a brokenness that affects all of us. And there are moments when we feel like the world around us, or perhaps even within us, is falling apart. See the danger though is in those moments, we feel like when those things are out of control, we should look to ourselves. That we are the answer to our problems. That we try to take control and hold all things together ourselves. That we try to be that glue that sustains our family, that sustains our faith, that sustains our friendships, that sustains our future. But what we find from this text is a different picture. That we on our own are not enough to depend on in those difficult moments. Instead, Jesus is the only one that can hold all things together. Paul is calling us to quit depending on ourselves and start depending on Christ. Back in the early summertime, after COVID had hit, all of the amusement parks around the world had closed down. And they were beginning to try to find ways to reopen. And so they came up with different new protocols about social distancing and sanitization and masks that had to be worn. But one of them that made international news was that the amusement parks in Japan also put out an instruction that said, you are not allowed to scream while riding roller coasters. They thought that would create too much risk at spreading

the virus. And so the instructions were that you should scream on the inside. And I thought, “Well you can’t think of a more fitting image for 2020 can you?” Screaming on the inside at the terrors and uncertainties that are to come. You know how a roller coaster works. Whether you love them or hate them, whether you’ve got your hands up or you’ve got a death grip, they strap you in before the ride begins because every twist and turn will take you in a direction where you can’t depend on yourself to hold you in safely in that moment. It’s only because of something outside yourself that meets you in the moment of your deepest need that you are able to be held together during that experience that you can anticipate or expect. Isn’t that what Paul is speaking of here when he talks of Jesus? That no matter how many twists and turns our lives entail, no matter what direction the roller coaster of this world takes us on, there is one outside of ourselves who will do whatever it takes to hold all things together. So the question we need to wrestle with this morning is that if Christ is holding all things together, why is it so difficult to trust Him to hold all things together in our lives? Paul is calling us to that deep and abiding trust where God’s goodness and His greatness meet playing out in the providence of Christ. See, Jesus holds all things together.

But I want you to notice the second aspect of Christ that Paul highlights here that should reshape our life beginning in verse 18 when he tells us that Jesus heads the new creation forever. He doesn’t just hold all things together. He heads the new creation forever. Look at how he says it there.

*<sup>18</sup>He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.*

So what Paul is highlighting here is a shift. This is where the bridge comes in. Where he’s turning his attention from Christ’s role in creation to now His role in the new creation. How He is bringing about that new creation through Himself, through His death, and through His resurrection. And He speaks there at the beginning of verse 18 of Christ as the head of the body, the church. Well what does he mean when he speaks of Christ as head? Well, hold your spot right here in Colossians 1 and look over one chapter with me. Because we’re going to see Paul speak about this head imagery twice. First in Colossians 2, verses 9 and 10. Slide over there and see how he says it. Speaking of Jesus, he says:

*<sup>9</sup>For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup>and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

So here in Colossians 2:9 and 10, Paul is highlighting the picture that the headship of Christ conveys His authority over His people. But then look down a few verses later in verses 18 and 19 of chapter 2 and let’s see the way it speaks about Christ as the head of the church again. He says this in verse 18.

*<sup>18</sup>Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going in to detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, <sup>19</sup>and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

So here he speaks of the head, not just as that of authority, but the source, the lifeblood, the one that gives growth, that provides for His church. And so you have this dual picture of the headship of Christ that Paul speaks of here in Colossians as both authority and source. To put it more simply, Jesus is both the author and the authority of the church. He creates the church and He sustains the church. He starts and He strengthens it. He produces it and He provides for it. He guides it and He grows it. He leads it and He feeds it. Christ is the head of His church. Paul speaks here in this moment of the role of Christ. That He is supreme over all creation. But He, in a unique way, in a special relationship, He is united to His new creation people in the church. That of head and body. There's this body metaphor that occurs throughout Paul's letters including three times in the book of Colossians. And the emphasis, the focus, is that of unity in the midst of diversity. Leadership and submission. These dual pictures of how Christ's authority in action ensures the unity of His kingdom people. Now we looked at this reality a couple of months ago from 1 Corinthians 12 when we walked through that message. And it focused on the body of Christ imagery, of how in Christ God brings those of us who are separate together as one. That idea of unity. But here instead, when Paul uses this body imagery, it speaks of head and body, the focus is not as much on unity as it is on authority. That Christ is sustaining His church. That Christ is at the center. So what does that mean for a church like Central? Well I want you to know. If you're a guest here this morning or if you're watching online, we are a church that is committed to Jesus. He is the head of our body. He is the center of our focus. His gospel is the foundation for our body of believers. In addition to that, we need to recognize that if the church is alive, that has all sorts of implications for how we carry out our mission. Because Paul is speaking here of head and body, living organisms. Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father. Living, ruling, and reigning, now manifesting that in the life of a church like this. We're the kingdom of God in miniature. We are that foretaste, that initial expression, conveying what it is that God is going to do in all of creation. Now how many of you know somebody that over the course of this COVID season, has delayed some sort of medical procedure because they just weren't sure it was safe? Maybe they wondered if the cure was actually more dangerous than the problem they had, whether that was something as simple as a dentist checkup or a well-check. Or maybe it was an elective surgery or some other thing. I saw statistics recently that said 40% of Americans delayed caring for their body during this time because of their concerns about these external threats around us. So often when we see external threats, it can lead us to not care well for ourselves internally. But when Paul speaks here of Jesus as the head of the body of Christ, the church, we need to recognize that Jesus cares more about His church than even we do. You might have grown up in this church and spent 50, 60, 70 years here. Maybe you were baptized right up here in this baptistery. Maybe you can still remember the days on Coulter. Maybe you've been in a leadership position for decades here. You know you care deeply about this church. You know you want to see Central thrive. But what Paul is reminding us of this morning, is that no matter how much we love the church, Jesus loves the church even more than us. And He is committed to His body. He is seeking its good. To care for its needs. To bring us back to our centrality on Christ because He is the head of the church. But don't miss it because Paul goes on there.

He doesn't just speak about Jesus as the head of the church, he also speaks about how He is at the helm of the entire new creation. Do you see how he says it in verse 18? He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. He is the beginning. He's the beginning of creation. Now He is the beginning of the new creation. And this idea of beginning, not just in terms of time, but in terms of priority; in terms of significance. And he pairs that with this term that he's already used back

in verse 15 of firstborn. So before he talked about He was the firstborn of all creation, now he tells us He is the firstborn from the dead. What an image. What does he mean when says, firstborn from the dead? What does Paul have in mind? He is speaking there of the resurrection of Jesus. This great mystery, this long awaited reality, that the people of God for centuries before the Messiah came hoped to see. And they assumed that when the resurrection came, when the Messiah came, that it would bring about the end. But what Paul tells us is that no, in fact, it was just a new beginning. That Jesus was both the end of the beginning and is now the beginning of the end. The firstborn from the dead. So take yourself back to that moment in Jerusalem on that first Easter. Jesus has been lain on the cross, His hands and feet pierced, that crown of thorns plunged against His head, He's pierced in the side, He is bearing the weight of your sin and mine. He is offering the gift of salvation. Exchanging our sin for His righteousness. And He is thrown into the grave. It is covered over by that stone. He is left for dead. But on that Sunday morning, remember what happens. A heart begins to beat again. A mind begins to think again. A nose begins to breathe again. An eye begins to see again. A hand begins to feel again. And in that moment, Paul is telling us He is the firstborn from the dead. That He is raised to newness of life. Why? So that He can defeat satan, sin, and death, and lead an army into this new creation with Him. So that we can experience that same new creation reality that God has already done for Jesus. He becomes a new creation so that He might make us a new creation. And that's the reality that we live in in this very moment. That right now Christ is seated at the right had of the Father ruling and reigning with all His enemies soon to be under His feet inviting us into this new creation that Paul speaks of here. He is the firstborn from the dead. And Paul then goes on to tell us why that's true.

Do you see it at the end of verse 18? What happens as a result of this new creation reality? Look at what it says. He says that in everything, Jesus might be preeminent. Now if you were to look in the original language, this term preeminent carries the force of being first place, most significant, it has this idea of supremacy or finishing first in a race. In fact, this is the only time this word in this way is used in the New Testament. And Paul speaks here of His standing in terms of His authority, His worth, His glory. All of these realities captured here in this idea of preeminence. And the Colossians would have known exactly what Paul had in mind in this moment. Because every time they picked up a Roman coin, they would see a picture of preeminence in that land. Because on the face of it would be an image of Caesar. The preeminent one this kingdom. The one who had all authority. The one who was worthy of all glory. Who was more significant than anyone else in his empire, under his rule and reign. He was supreme. And when Paul speaks here of the preeminence of Jesus, he is reminding us that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not. That these Colossians who would have been surrounded by the declaration of the world around them, that something else was preeminent, would know that it was Jesus Himself who was truly supreme. And isn't that a word for you and me this morning? In a culture all around us who is looking for other things for significance, seeking to find supremacy in other realities. We are being reminded of the fact that Jesus Himself is preeminent. But if you're looking at the flow of this text, this might strike you as a bit unusual. Because Paul has already spoken of the preeminence of Christ; His supremacy in creation. But the way he words it here in verse 18 is that Jesus became the firstborn from the dead in order to achieve the result of His preeminence. So how can He both already be preeminent and yet become preeminent through His resurrection, through ushering in the new creation? What Paul is doing is balancing for us two realities. That the deity of Christ reveals His supremacy, but the resurrection of Christ expresses it. In other words, that at the cross and in the resurrection, Jesus

becomes what He already was. He demonstrates, He validates His supremacy over this entire universe, over all creation and most of all this morning in the life of you and me.

The question we need to wrestle with; is Jesus preeminent in your life? If somebody were to look at the way you use your time, your talents, and your treasure, would the only possible conclusion that they draw about the reality of your life be, this is someone who is gripped by the preeminence of Jesus. And if the answer to that is no, what's holding you back from making that true today? What's holding you back from surrendering to His kingship right now, committing to submit to Him and follow His authority in leadership every day of your life? My family spent about a decade living in northern California. It was after I had already come to school at A&M. And while they were out there, they had to be ready for earthquakes. You never knew when they were coming. And when I was out there, I experienced a few small ones, but I've never been a part of a big one. But they tell you every earthquake is different. Some kind of bounce you up and down. Some make you feel like they're rolling. The intensity, the duration, the feel of them is different in each circumstance. But you know one thing you can always count on about an earthquake? It happens when you least expect it. You can't anticipate it. You can't plan for it. You can't prepare for it. Now here's something interesting about this letter that Paul writes to the Colossian church. It's written in the early 60's A.D. And the scholars in that time period believe that not long after, within a year or two after Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians, the entire town of Colossae, in fact, the whole region around it was devastated by an earthquake. Something they couldn't expect. Something they couldn't anticipate totally disrupted their lives, their expectations, their direction. And yet, God knew the word that they needed before the tragedy came to sustain them in the moment. I can't help but wonder if there were Colossians that walked out of their crumbled homes and looked at one another and said to themselves, "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together." God met them with His word before they encountered the difficulties of life. And I can't help but wonder as we gather in this room or as you watch online, who is it that may have an unexpected earthquake heading your way? Maybe it's that text message that says, "Hey, we need to talk." Or maybe it's that bad report from the doctor. Or maybe it's that broken relationship, or that pink slip. You can't anticipate it. But what we're reminded of here in this moment, is that Jesus meets us in His need. And He meets our problems with a promise. That He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And the call of the gospel for each one of us this morning is that if our lives are shaken, we can trust that Jesus knew what was coming and that His goodness and His greatness will meet us in the moment and sustain us by His Spirit because in Christ He is holding our life together.

Let's pray right now.

Father, I don't know what's going on in the hearts of those in the room this morning. There may be people right now that are wrestling with the reality of a broken world around them. Broken hearts, broken lives, they've come in here on their last legs. And I pray in this time, Lord, You would meet them in this moment. And Father, if there are people in this room that have not yet bowed their knee to the supremacy of Jesus, that have turned to Him in salvation, abandon all the other things the world has to offer, Lord. Would right now be the moment where You would break their hearts and replace them with hearts of flesh. That they might follow You all of their days. And I'm praying for our people, God, within this church and around this community that when the earthquakes of life come, when the challenging moments occur, that we will cling to

this reality. That we will press into your goodness and your greatness and we will trust you in all things. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.