



### Colossians 1:15-23

This is a photo of the Helix Nebula, also known as NGC 7293, also known as the God's Eye Nebula, which we would all agree is aptly named. It is 700 light years away, which is relatively close given that the size of the universe is estimated to be 93 billion light years. If the universe were the size of the earth's oceans, we could skip a rock to the Helix Nebula.

We think we know the size of the universe but that does not mean that we can comprehend it, does it? But at least trying to wrap our minds around the expanse of the universe can better help us appreciate this section of Colossians. Verses 15-20 of chapter one are widely regarded as some of the most important verses in all of the New Testament. Most consider it to be a hymn. Scholars believe that either Paul wrote the hymn or else he made use of an existing hymn but either way, it has we can see that it has a different feel and rhythm to it as it teaches foundational truth. As I read, try to catch its hymn like quality.

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And 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. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

*<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

I assume you can see the immediate connection between the Helix Nebula and this passage. It clearly states that Jesus is the preexistent, uncreated Creator. We already knew that from John chapter one, right? “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). Notice John’s positive and negative declarations.

Positive—All things were made through him

Everything was created by Jesus. All things. Everything you see was created by Jesus out of nothing. Lest we had any doubts, he stated the truth another way.

Negative—and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John is eliminating any possibility that anything exists that was not brought into being by Jesus.

We can see how similar the language is in Colossians. <sup>16</sup> *For by him all things were created. Lest we had any doubt about what all things means, Paul gets very specific. Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.* Paul is saying what John said. All things were created by Jesus and there is nothing in the universe that was not created by him.

Paul is building what is called a Christology—a complete theology about who Jesus is. As I said, this is one of the clearest, beautiful and theologically rich Christologies in all of the New Testament. And this was necessary in Paul’s day for the same reason it is necessary today. Our God is too small. Think about it. Our confidence in something is based on its inherent power and ability.

Take the Golden State warriors for example. They are highly favored to win the NBA title for the third year in a row, but things don’t look so great for them at the moment. The team is already stacked with talent but for the sake of argument let’s assume they had the fifteen best players in the NBA on their team. With that much talent, they could easily go undefeated in the regular season and sweep the playoffs. Let’s say they won every game throughout the season and up until the final series. We would expect them to win the title and almost certainly go undefeated, right? Our confidence them would be in direct proportion to their inherent power and strength. The floor you are all sitting on is strong and secure. If it were sitting on a concrete slab, it would be even more secure, but if it were one hundred feet in the air balancing on a rickety scaffolding in a 50 mile an hour wind, we would not be so confident.

Our faith in something is only as strong as the inherent strength of the object itself. Therefore, if our faith is small it is because our God is small. A bigger more magnificent God is the only thing that will lead to a stronger faith. Of course God never becomes greater and more magnificent, but our understanding of him can do that.

With that in mind, look with me at verse fifteen. *He is the image of the invisible God.* Last Sunday our family went to All Glazed Up in La Crosse to do paint a piece of pottery. I was a little worried—no that’s wrong, I was a LOT worried about my project because I am the furthest thing from an artist that you can get. I figured my project would look like something made by a kindergartner. Whatever it is that I wanted to create would not look like it was intended to look.

A tree would not look like a tree. A car would not look like a car. I am simply incapable of replicating any sort of image.

So I am the exact opposite of Jesus. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is a perfect image of his Father. One commentator wrote this. “Image then is more than a ‘shadow’; rather it is a replication.”<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 1:3 contains the same truth. *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.* In every possible way, Jesus replicates his Father. The Son is the exact image and imprint of the Father.

The Greek word for imprint is where we get our word character. Do you want to know the Greek word for character? Are you ready to write this down? The Greek word for character is character. Technically, you pronounce it a little differently but it’s the same word and it means exact image, exact representation; no flaws, no deviations from the original.<sup>2</sup> Do you see then what it means to have the character of Christ? It means that Jesus’ character is imprinted on us. It means that we are aiming at nothing less an exact representation of Jesus in our lives.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. I need to say a little about that last phrase. This phrase, “the firstborn of creation” was used to come up with the 4th century heresy of Arianism which taught that Jesus was a created being. They deny the deity of Christ.

The council of Nicea was gathered to specifically address this heresy. Their doctrinal statement known as the Nicene Creed improved upon the Apostle’s Creed and clarified the Biblical teaching against this heresy about Jesus. The pertinent section reads as follows.

We believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
begotten from the Father before all ages,  
God from God,  
Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made;  
of the same essence as the Father.  
Through him all things were made.

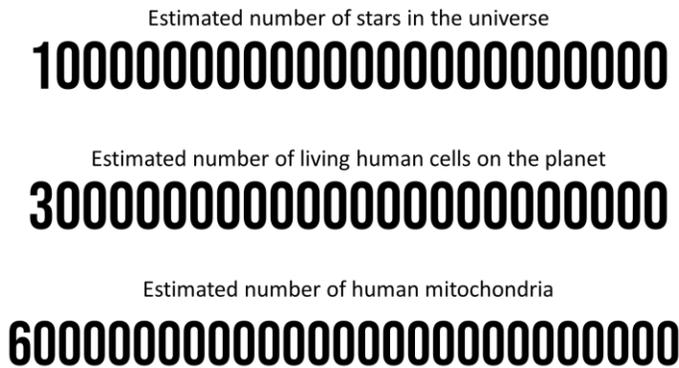
The key phrase is “of the same essence as the Father.” This merely put into a doctrinal statement what passages like Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 were already saying. Jesus is the exact image of the Father. Verse 19 is teaching the same truth. “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses still teach this ancient heresy that Jesus is not fully God.

“Mormons do not accept the phrase in the Nicene Creed that describes the Father and Son as being “of one substance.”<sup>3</sup>

“Like the ancient Arians, these modern-day Witnesses believe that Jesus is a created being who is therefore not eternal and not God. They specifically argue that Jesus was Michael the Archangel.”<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the Greek word translated as firstborn very often has nothing to do with actual birth. It simply means first in supremacy. In ancient culture, the firstborn child was the favored one, the one who would inherit the largest portion of inheritance. Plus, it would be nonsensical to say that Jesus created all that there is or ever will be just after saying that Jesus was created by the Father. In verse 15 and 18, the word firstborn means “the supreme one.” This word occurs six times in the New Testament and six of those refer to Jesus and his ultimate supremacy.

I already touched on verses 16-17 a bit but want to mention a few things. Jesus created all that there is. Of course we will never be able to fully comprehend the power and magnitude of his creation and how powerful he had to be to bring all of this into existence. Here are a few factoids.



Mitochondria are the little energy factories in our cells. That means that there is much more mitochondria on the planet than there are stars in the universe. You could spend your entire life exploring the complexity and wonder of God’s creation. Sadly, many people do this and not only miss the glory of God but actually deny the existence of the Creator.

I took Organic Chemistry in college—my hardest class by far. I don’t remember much from that class, but I do remember what happened one of those days. The professor spent at least 15 minutes writing biochemical equations and processes on the chalkboard. He literally filled the board from one end to the other. At the end, he said, “And if this electron here did not move over there, we’d all be dead.” That same idea is true countless times over. The human body is so complex and full of wonder. In an average lifetime, your heart will beat over 3 billion times. How is this possible? We all spend a lot of our time fixing or having someone else fix our cars, appliances and just about anything else that we own. Everything we own is constantly breaking down and falling apart, yet your heart can beat 3 billion times and not wear out.

Here’s a way to see the beauty and meaning of this section.

*all things* For **by him**  
*were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*

*all things* were created **through him** and **for him**.  
*And he is before*

*all things,*  
*and in him*  
*all things*  
*hold together.*

First you can see the repetition of the phrase “all things”. You can also more clearly see the prepositions by him, through him, for him and in him.

Technology is growing at an exponential rate and will continue to do so. It took us thousands of years to get the printing press and the steam engine but in the last one hundred years, we have gotten everything else. I can still remember the grainy black and white image on our TV when I saw the astronauts walk on the moon for the first time. It’s not only amazing that they put men on the moon and then brought them back but that they did it with such small computing power. Look at the difference between and IMB mainframe use in the Apollo space project compared to an iPhone 6.

**iPhone 6 vs. IBM Mainframe**

SPEED	32,000X faster
RAM	250,000X larger
WEIGHT	11,000X lighter
COST	18,000X cheaper

Here’s my point. Regardless of how much longer technology will increase in the future, we will never get close to approaching the knowledge that God has placed within his creation. Our knowledge and technology could triple every day for a million years and still not get there.

I love the phrase “in him all things hold together.” This means exactly what you think it means. Jesus literally holds every atom of the universe together in the palm of his hand. Humans have always tried to harness and control power. The explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor is a great example of the true limits of our power.



Human error and hubris caused that tragedy but there's another explosion that occurred 100 years ago that killed almost as many people as Chernobyl and yet most people have never heard of it. It is called the Boston Molasses Disaster. In January of 1919, a 2.3 million gallons tank of molasses exploded in Boston. It exploded for the same reason as Chernobyl—high pressure and human error. The explosion created a 25 foot high wave of molasses which traveled at 35 miles per hour killed 21 people and injured 150. We all know the power and damage that water can do, but since molasses is thicker, it contained more kinetic energy and brought about more destructive force. Yet Jesus holds together the forces of hot molasses. He holds together the forces of a nuclear reactor. And he holds together the forces of the universe in the palm of his hand. If we don't see this then our God is too small.

So it doesn't matter if we peer into the vast reaches of space, delve into the inner recesses of the human body or anything in between, Jesus created all of it by him, through him, in him and for him. And if all of it was created for him, what does that make us? That means that you are I are not the center of the universe. But that's not how we usually live our lives. The average Christian wants God to revolve around them and not the other way around. We can start to feel like God owes us something—or even lots of things. If we are disappointed with an aspect of our lives we can begin to quietly blame God for it. In what ways does God revolve around your life instead of the other way around?

This is also why I appreciate presentations of the gospel that begin with creation. In all of our welcome packets we give to first time visitors we have a tract called Two Ways to Live. It is the only gospel tract I am familiar with that begins with creation. Not just creation but very much like what we are talking about this morning. Jesus is the creator of all and it's all for him, therefore we are under his allegiance. We are in his kingdom. Our lives revolve around Jesus and not the other way around.

This could be why many people reject the gospel. If you just start with the bad news of sin, some people will object that it is not fair for God to punish us for our sin—if they even admit that they do sin. But if you begin with all of creation being by him, through him, in him and for him, that changes the playing field from the start. We are not our own. We are not masters of our destiny. We belong to God and every sin is an act of treason against the King.

We are using this tract for our VBS this year and combining it with the wordless book and the color bracelet. We start with God and then move to creation, establishing that this is his Kingdom, his domain and we are his subjects.

<p>In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.</p> <p>Genesis 1:1</p>		<p><b>GOLD</b> reminds us of HEAVEN, the kingdom of light.</p> <p>In the beginning was God. God always existed. God lived in the perfect place; the place we call the Kingdom of Light.</p>	<p>"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."</p> <p>Rev. 4:11</p>		<p><b>GREEN</b> reminds us of CREATION, the amazing home that God made for us.</p> <p>God is the ruler of the world because He made the world. He is a very good king, and when He made the world, he said it was "good." And then he made people, and he said it was "very good." He put people in charge of looking after the world, but under His direction.</p>
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<p>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.</p> <p>Rom. 3:23</p> <p>For the wages of sin is death</p> <p>Rom 6:23</p>	<p>This <b>DARK</b> color reminds us of the sadness and darkness of SIN and DEATH.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>But people chose to disobey God and go their own way. This is sin. Sin wrecked the beautiful place God had made. It made sadness and fighting and sickness and death. Everyone of us has sinned, and sin separates us from God.</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>This brings spiritual death and real death, because death is what happens when there is no life.</p> </div> </div>
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Then when you get to sin and death, our rebellion against the King begins to make more sense in this context. If we just did some bad things, what difference does it make? But if we rebelled against the One who created all things by him, through him, in him and for him, some who hear this will see their sin as treason.

Paul closed out this Christological hymn by declaring the gospel. <sup>21</sup> *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* <sup>22</sup> *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*

If you can see the link between God's absolute sovereignty and our sinful rebellion, then hopefully you can also see the link between his absolute rule and his work of salvation. We were once alienated and hostile in mind. But if everything was created by him, through him in him and for him, then Jesus clearly has the power to reconcile us, especially when the price paid was "his body of flesh by his death." And what is the result? *in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.* Remember we saw last week that the holiness that Jesus give us is the same holiness by which he is defined.

I'd like to close with a two-minute song. As you listen and read the words, see if you can catch all of the themes from this Christological hymn in Colossians.

[Immanuel by Beautiful Eulogy](#)

Lift up your eyes and see the riches of the  
all-sufficient King seated on his throne in glory  
See his scepter that stretches the expanse of unmeasured space  
Hear Him who holds all things together declare  
"All things are mine without exception"  
See the curiosity of the cosmos  
As Christ condescends to His most cherished creatures  
See the astonishment of angels as the Almighty advances towards Earth  
See the humility of the pre-existent King born of a virgin birth  
The Infinite becomes infant, the Maker becomes man  
The divine becomes despised and the Christ is crucified  
The Author of all creation cursed upon the tree  
That He himself spoke into being  
And the Lord of life was laid in the tomb  
But the grave could not contain Him  
and so the Son of Man was raised to life  
But why?  
To draw near, to pierce our greatest fear  
To shed satisfying blood on our behalf  
To give back the life we were meant to have  
To enjoy, to hear, to adore, to taste  
And to look with peace upon our Savior's face  
And to embrace Him with an undying faith  
To interpose all His worthiness into us  
And serve the most unworthy and undeserving  
He is our God and we are mere men made by Him  
We are not like Him but he loves us and moves among us  
The great uncreated and the created no longer separated  
He is Immanuel, God with us

**Rich Maurer**  
**June 9, 2019**

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<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, 226

<sup>2</sup> χαρακτήρ—the exact expression (the image) of any person or thing, marked likeness, precise reproduction in every respect, i.e. facsimile

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/10/is-mormonism-christian>

<sup>4</sup> <https://carm.org/arianism-and-its-influence-today>