

Living Life Successfully

# The Preeminent

Who Jesus Is

Seven days reveling in Colossians

Charles L. Stanley



**Just a quick word before** getting into the seven days in Colossians. This devotional is a little different from most.

Most devotionals identify a small portion of Scripture and list a longer reference you are supposed to look up in your Bible. You're supposed to read it first then read the devotional. But, I believe most people are similar to me. I get lazy when reading that form of devotional. I don't open my Bible and a devotional. I just figure I know what that Scripture is about and read the devotional.

You see, my words have no inherent power. God's word does. So, I format this devotional a little differently.

Each day is two pages. Page one is a little longer passage of Scripture than you normally see in a devotional book. The second page for the day is my commentary that will hopefully lend some insight to the Scripture and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, illumine the Scripture to you.

I would like to hear back from you and get your feedback on this format. Do you find it helpful, or not? Send me your thoughts at [cls@charlesstanley.com](mailto:cls@charlesstanley.com).

## COLOSSIANS 1:9-23

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# THE SIMPLE SECRET TO FIXING THE WHOLE WORLD

Because Jesus Christ was the Creator of all things, both visible and invisible, and the goal of all creation (it was for him) he is referred to as God's firstborn. He is also God's firstborn from the dead never to die again and will be followed by Christians in the resurrection. So, in everything he has the preeminence.

Upon the father's death, the firstborn son in Israel received a double portion of the family inheritance and became the head of the family. He was the preeminent son.

In Exodus 4:22, Israel is referred to as God's firstborn. As to birth order, Jacob, later renamed Israel, was the second child born, not first. But now, God states that Israel is his firstborn, the one whom God has chosen to be the inheritor and head of the family.

David, the *youngest* son of Jesse, is referred to as God's firstborn. Here God speaks to his promise that David will be the preeminent King. This promise will be fulfilled in Christ at his second coming. And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth (Psalm 89:27).

Jesus Christ is the ultimate son of David and will rule on David's throne forever. Jesus Christ is the heir of all things. (Hebrews 1:2)

When I was 19 years old and had just recently been "turned on" to Christ, I remember singing the chorus, "Thou Art Worthy," taken from Revelation 4:11. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." (KJV) My heart was initially offended with the phrasing, "and for thy pleasure they are created." Then I realized how self-centered I was, and Jesus began a long process of "fixing" me.

It changed my life to realize that the purpose of my life, and the whole universe for that matter, is to please God, to glorify him. I was no longer at the center of my universe, although I do sometimes forget that fact. He is worthy.

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## DAY 2

# THE BIGGEST SECRET TO LIFE MOST COLLEGE PROFESSORS WILL NEVER TELL YOU

Christ is the Creator of all things and all things were created for him. He existed before creation, and now all creation is held together or sustained by him. Consequently, he is due honor and thanks.

In our popular culture, this is heresy. This isn't "science." No, it is the foundation of science.

Science is the discovery of the laws of nature. The question is, from where did the laws of nature come and why do they consistently work?

The laws of nature (science) are nothing less than the unwritten Word of God spoken at creation that has been discovered by humans inquiring into God's creation to see how he has designed it (whether the inquirer realizes this or not).

There is no conflict between God's word and science when science fully and accurately understands the universe (which it acknowledges it does not yet) and God's word is properly understood (and honest Christians also acknowledge that there are some things difficult to understand). That's right, no conflict between real science and Scripture. Unfortunately, we do not have *absolute* clarity in either science or Scripture and so must hold tentatively our seeming conflicts.

Science cannot explain the end goal of existence and cannot provide purpose to life. This only comes from the Creator.

I remember my college freshman course, Introduction to Philosophy. I really struggled to grasp what some of those philosophers (like Rene Descartes, "I think. Therefore I am.") were saying.

Years later as I began reading the works of Dr. Francis Schaeffer, it dawned on me that I was understanding the world as the Scripture describes it as a Creator and a creation. Some of these philosophers were attempting to make sense of the world without God. No wonder I couldn't connect with their thinking.

A universe without God has no meaning or purpose. A universe created and sustained by a God who has reconciled himself to it by the blood of the cross has eternal meaning and value.

The gospel is that God in Christ has initiated a gracious reconciliation with us and we need only trust him to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.



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## DAY 3

# IF YOU CAN'T SEE GOD, YOU'RE LOOKING IN THE WRONG PLACE

The trajectory of the gospel is and always has been God reaching to us, not us trying to work our way to God. Jesus Christ is God's ultimate revelation of himself to us. If you want to know God, get to know Jesus. He is the God we can see and touch.

Yeah, I know, he isn't physically here now, but he was. And he will be again. John had to deal with this myth about Jesus not being a real human less than 60 years after Christ had been crucified. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." (1 John 1:1) And Peter too had to address this, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.." 2 Peter 1:16

God has always been reaching out to us. In the years before his birth as Jesus, Christ, the Son of God, was reaching out to humanity. He was the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, who stood on the rock Moses was instructed to strike with his rod to provide water to Israel in the wilderness. (Exodus 17:6) He wrestled with Jacob (Gen 32:24) and descended Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:12). He appeared to Moses as "the LORD, the LORD (I am)" and declared his name (Exodus 34:6).

In John's gospel, Jesus declares himself to be the "I am" seven times and then said, "Before Abraham was, I am." Then he tells his disciples, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

God in Christ has physically penetrated into human history to reconcile himself to us, and all of his creation through his real blood shed on a real cross in Jerusalem.

Be emboldened, it pleased God for his fullness to dwell in the historical Jesus. Your faith is sound and is meant to be lived in real life.



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## WHAT MAKES GOD HAPPY?

It makes God happy for all of his fullness to dwell in Christ. God does what he does for his own pleasure. For humans, this would be an undesirable attitude of self-centeredness. For God, who is perfect, it is the only reasonable motive for doing anything.

Paul repeats this truth in chapter 2, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority" (Col 2:9-10).

The infinite God who is separate from and outside of creation was pleased to squeeze all of his fullness into the person of Jesus Christ. In turn, it has please God to allow the fulness of Christ to dwell in us. That is mind boggling. Through this marvelous eternal plan, the infinite creator-God has arranged to live in me. This is the basis of our hope of our glorious resurrection, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Contemplating these facts creates in me both strong self-esteem and a tremendous sense of humility. Self-esteem because of the tremendous love that has motivated God toward me and humility because it is all of grace, I have never deserved any of it and I never will.

My only proper response to this is to offer my worship to God. "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1)

Think on this, the infinite God, by grace alone, has come to dwell in you by faith, assuming you have placed your trust in Christ and his finished work. Does that strengthen you to move forward into your life's challenges? Remember, doing this for you makes him happy.

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## THE IMPOSSIBLE TRANSFORMATION

Jesus Christ became fully human so that in his death he could eliminate the effects of our alienation, our hostile thinking and our need to do evil deeds. Instead, he presents us to God without defect and above reproach in Christ.

This mystery of Jesus Christ being at the same time fully God and fully human is foundational to Christianity and is essential to our salvation.

Only God could present himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins, so Jesus Christ had to be fully God. Only another man can die on our behalf knowing the reality of our pain, temptation, and agony, so Jesus Christ had to be fully human. "Jesus took a human body to save our bodies. And he took a human mind to save our minds. Without becoming man in his emotions, he could not have saved our emotions. And without taking a human will, he could not save our will." (David Mathis, [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org)).

The Apostle John took this reality very seriously, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already" (1 John 4:2-3). "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist." (2 John 7)

This is the impossible mystery of Jesus Christ being fully man and fully God at the same time which makes possible the impossible transformation of humans from people alienated from God, with hostile thinking, and a commitment to evil deeds to people without defect and blameless before God. It is impossible, but it has happened anyway.

If you feel alienated from God, hostile in your thinking, or stuck in some evil deeds and don't know how to get out, know this: he has reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death, to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. Believe it.

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As the reconciler of all things in heaven and on earth, we find Jesus Christ to be a cosmic Savior in addition to being my personal Savior.

As individuals, our personal salvation is of first importance. Let's face it; we are selfish about things like our eternal destiny. If we, however, limit our view of what Christ did on the cross to just personal salvation of individual humans, then we are missing a great deal of what it is all about.

When God dealt with Adam and Eve at the fall, he cursed the ground and agriculture has been difficult ever since. But, the effects of sin didn't stop there. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:20-21). The fallout from sin has affected the entire universe.

At the personal level, we look forward joyfully to the resurrection. We will have new bodies like the resurrection body of Jesus. No more pain, sickness, or weakness...no more deformation of bodies. We will experience wholeness beyond our wildest dreams.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:1-4).

Ultimately, the resurrection will not only mean new bodies for us, but there will also be a new heaven and new earth. Jesus is providing a cosmic salvation. If you think this world is beautiful, just wait!



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## THE CURE FOR THE REGRETS OF THE PAST AND ANXIETIES OF THE FUTURE

Before the beginning, before there was an earth, before there were stars, before there were angels or demons before there was anything, there was God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; one God in three persons eternally.

Excuse my anthropomorphic language, but one day, God held an executive session in the heavenly boardroom and approved an eternal plan of salvation. Of course, that plan included the creation of a universe with people in it who would rebel and need to be restored to God. There was a lot of detail in that plan. It included a book in which all the names of we who believe are listed (Revelation 13:8; Ephesians 1:4-5). Before the beginning, he knew my name. Before the beginning, he knew your name.

Did you ever wonder why the laws of nature always hold true? Simply, it is because “in him, all things hold together.” Science is possible because he holds all things together. At his core, he is “steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6-7).

Life can be lived successfully when it is lived by grace through faith in Christ. That is because he holds all things together. This is his sovereignty in action.

When I came to grips with the sovereignty of God in all things (something hard for we humans, I admit), I was relieved of a great deal of anxiety and regret about my life. While I do hold to the proposition that we are responsible for our actions, and we need to make good decisions in life, I also recognize that he is in control of my life and makes all things work together for my good to conform me to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28-30).

How about your life? Would it help to recognize that the one who is your Almighty Savior is before all things and in him, all things hold together? In him, marriages hold together. In him, churches hold together. In him, the laws of hard science hold together. All things hold together.

Sin has broken our world, but in his death and resurrection, Jesus has provided for restoration. In addition to our personal restoration to God, the entire universe will one day be restored to a new heaven and new earth.

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