

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 227

Colossians 1:13-20

August 4, 2018

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

Colossians 1:13-20 contains some of the most important Christological content in the New Testament. It is also home to some of the most misunderstood. For example, does referring to Jesus as “firstborn” suggest that he was created? Does it point to chronology—that Jesus was the first created thing? How is that reconcilable with the “fullness of God” being in Jesus? When verse 20 speaks of “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” being reconciled to God through Jesus does that mean that Satan and fallen angels can be—and ultimately will be—forgiven for their sins and redeemed? This episode discusses all these and other issues.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, episode 227: Colossians 1:13-20. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: Pretty good. I’m doing this out of state, in a state that is hotter than my home state. [laughter] I’m in North Carolina; it’s hot here.

TS: Yeah, well, the good news for me is that I got my air conditioning fixed, so I’m sitting here nice and cool. So we can talk about heat all day long, because I’m good to go.

MH: Well, that’s good! How many weeks did that take? It had to be a month.

TS: Yeah, not quite. Home warranty, and all that good stuff... yada, yada... trying to play that game. But the good news is, I’ve got float sensors installed in my air conditioning unit. In high humidity cities, your spillways will clog up and won’t drain, and the spill pan will overflow and leak through the ceiling. So anybody out there that lives in high humidity places that run central air, go get your drains checked and go install some float switches in your A/C units. It’ll save you.

MH: It'll save you your agony.

TS: There you go. There's a tip right there.

MH: [laughs] This is like HGTV, except there's no TV. [laughs]

TS: Yep, so there you go, Mike. A/C and Colossians, hand in hand. But I'm excited about this episode. We're getting into some of the good stuff (stuff that people have wondered about) in the next several episodes. So it's amazing that chapter 1 is going to be spread out over 3+ episodes. That just tells you right there how much stuff is going on in this book.

MH: Yeah, the first couple chapters, especially, are just chock-full of stuff. In today's episode (verses 13-20), we're going to hit a few things that we hit on in the Hebrews series (specifically some stuff in Hebrews 1), but it bears repeating. I can't assume everybody listened through all the episodes of Hebrews or would even remember. There's going to be a bit of overlap, and then some other things thrown in. In the first few chapters, there's a lot of places you can camp, which is good. We don't mind taking the time to do it.

So today, it's verses 13-20 of chapter 1. And if you listened to the previous episode, we ended with verse 13, but I just wanted to include it in our jumping-in point here. Verse 13 said:

¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...

And then the verse that follows (verse 14) says:

¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So last time at the end of the episode we talked about how these are aorists and the kingdom present is already a reality that exists. We've been transferred from the domain of darkness (we talked about some of the associations with that) and transferred to the kingdom of his beloved son (that this is a present reality) in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. So obviously, the transferal into the kingdom has something to do with redemption and the forgiveness of sins. And without being too elementary, there actually is something in here that I thought... Maybe the bulk of the listeners will go, "Oh, you've got to be kidding." But I get enough email that I thought this is worth parking on a little bit, so I'm going to do it. If you compare Colossians 1:14 with Ephesians 1:7, you notice something right away. So let me read Colossians 1:14 again:

¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Ephesians 1:7 is:

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace...

5:00

You say, “What’s the difference?” Well, Ephesians 1:7 has a reference to the blood of Christ, and Colossians 1:14 doesn’t. You say, “Well, big deal. Paul wrote them both.” And that’s true. If you’ve done something like a Kay Arthur series, or some series Bible study, or a verse by verse series at church, and you’ve hit Ephesians and Colossians, your instructor or pastor should told you that Ephesians and Colossians are very, very similar. For instance, if you have a good New Testament survey, your New Testament survey might refer to Ephesians and Colossians as the “twin epistles.” There’s a great deal of overlap between these two epistles. And you say, “Well, Paul wrote them both.” Yeah, he did, but Paul wrote other epistles, too. He wrote Romans, he wrote Philippians, and they don’t align together, or with Ephesians and Colossians. So there’s something about the circumstances of these two epistles, and it has to do with the chronology of Paul’s life. It has to do with where he was, the proximity of Ephesus and Colossae, just all that sort of stuff. But he writes a lot of the same content to two different audiences, and they become letters known to us as the letter to the Ephesians and the letter to the Colossians. You say, “Okay, well, that’s interesting, but what’s the big deal?” “If they’re so similar,” some people ask, “why do we have a difference here? Why does Ephesians 1:7 say, ‘In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,’ and here in Colossians, it’s, ‘in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins?’”

Believe it or not, there are some people who will say that somebody—some evil scribe... or they’ll typically attribute it to the evil personages of Wescott and Hort with the modern Greek text in the 1880’s, when they published their first critical edition of the Greek New Testament, that, historically speaking, overturned the Textus Receptus and overturned the Majority Text type as the basis for subsequent English translations. The Textus Receptus, which was actually created in 1633 (not 1611) became the basis for the King James translation. And, of course, there are other manuscript traditions in the Majority Text that contributed to the King James, as well. But after Wescott and Hort in the late 1880s (and we actually did a whole episode on this with Rick Brannen, “How we got the New Testament”)... After the 1880’s, that all changed with the work of Wescott and Hort.

Well, there are a lot of people out there who are in the “King James Only” crowd, and even King James preference crowd. Some of those people (but all of the KJV-only folks) will say, “Well, this is proof. They took the blood out of this verse. Wescott and Hort, they were heretics. They were evil. They were Satan

worshippers or Illuminati members,” or whatever sort of silliness that people would say nowadays. And in Christian Middle Earth, there’s more of that than you would think, so this is why I wanted to include it. It’s just nonsense. First of all, you don’t need “in the blood” in both references to have a theology of the blood. There are plenty of other verses out there that are in the Wescott and Hort text like the one in Ephesians. So to accuse them of this is just absurd.

Now, I mention this, realizing that it’s probably only going to be pertinent to a small portion of the audience, but within this thing I affectionately call “Christian Middle Earth,” there are people whose faith revolves around the King James Bible translation. There’s nothing wrong with the King James Bible. It’s like any other translation; in fact, it’s probably better than some of the modern ones in terms of the quality of translation. But every translation is the same: they all have strengths and weaknesses. There’s no evil, overarching, satanic conspiracy that cooperates with New Testament textual criticism. It’s absurd, it’s a fallacy, and frankly, it’s a lie. Now, I wanted to mention a few sources here. Metzger’s *Textual Commentary* writes this of our passage here:

The Textus Receptus, following several secondary witnesses, interpolates from Eph 1:7 the words διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ [through his blood]. If the phrase had been present originally [in Colossians 1], there would have been no reason for scribes to omit it.

10:00

He’s right. The Majority Text has it in both places, but the Wescott and Hort omits it here in Colossians. Actually, they don’t omit it, because they can’t find good manuscript evidence for it. So what Metzger’s saying is that the people who created the Textus Receptus drew the blood in from Ephesians 1 and they added it to Colossians here because they’re so much identical everywhere else. And so they presumed, “Well, it probably belongs here.” And they put it in, and the rest is history. It became part of the Textus Receptus, and then it became part of the King James. But it’s not part of the other ones because the oldest manuscripts (and frankly, what are considered the *best* manuscripts—several of them, anyway) don’t have it in. And Metzger says there would be no reason for an ancient scribe to take it out, so this is probably good evidence that it’s not in the oldest stuff. So it just wasn’t there. Paul just didn’t put it in in Colossians 1, but he does include the phrase back in Ephesians 1:7. And that’s completely reasonable. For those who are interested in this topic or maybe have friends who are swept up in the King James Only kind of silliness, I would recommend (and I’ve recommended this before, when we did our episode with Rick Brannen) D.A. Carson’s short little book called *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*.

I’ll give you one instance. Part of the argument of the TR [Textus Receptus] (the King James Only crowd) is to accuse the Alexandrian text (the Wescott and Hort text—that whole tradition) of heresy because of stuff like this. “Well, they took the

blood out of Colossians 1:20. They're heretics!" [sigh] Well, the blood's in lots of other passages in the Wescott and Hort text, so it's nonsense at the beginning, but you can play the same game against the King James. And Carson does this to illustrate the silliness of the whole argument. There's a place in Carson's book where he has a chart of eight famous Christological passages—passages that bring out the deity of Christ—and then he creates this chart and has a number of translations in there and how they render things. He includes the King James. And the King James fails to make the deity of Christ clear in four of them—fully half of them! Now, are we going to accuse the people who created the King James of heresy, that they're trying to hide something? Well, of course not. That's just ridiculous. It's ridiculous working it from the other side, as well.

By the way, Carson's chart includes the New World Translation, which is the Jehovah's Witnesses' translation, and that, of course, obscures the deity in all eight passages. That's how you do heresy, right there. There's obviously an agenda there. But in other translations, including the King James, when something's clear one place and not clear in another, it's not an agenda. Otherwise, they'd do them all. They'd get rid of them all. And so this kind of argumentation is just nonsense. It's nonsense for other reasons, but I don't want to belabor the point. But I thought since we ran into this in Colossians 1:14, I'll say something about it, because I get the emails. I get the, "Oh, you've got to watch this YouTube video about..." Look, I used to teach this stuff in Bible college. I taught a course on advanced bibliology. I know it all. I've heard it all. I've heard all the arguments. I know all the names. I'm not going to learn anything here. And I understand why it just doesn't work and why it's nonsense. So don't get wrapped up into this King James Only conspiracy talk. It's a fallacy and it's just demonstrably not true. It's not coherent.

So let's move on to the rest of the passage here. Let's jump into 15 and 16, because there are a number of phrases here that... Lots of places to camp here. Let me just read the next two verses:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 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.

There's just so much here. Any two or three of these could be a full episode, but I'm going to try to hit all of these in this episode and try to do due justice to what's going on here. We look at the phrases, "image of the invisible God," "firstborn of all creation"... We've got a number of phrases here, if you keep going down: "before all things," "he holds all things together," "the firstborn from the dead," "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." We're going to hit those in 17-19. There's just a lot of things here. So let's take these two verses that I read and just camp on them a little bit. We're going to come back to this whole idea of

“image of the invisible God” when we talk about some of the phrases in verses 17-19, so let’s just camp on “firstborn” right here and we’ll discuss that phrase that comes from verse 15, and then a little bit later we’ll pick up on “image of the invisible God” aspect when we hit the next three verses. So “firstborn of all creation” in Colossians 1:15... We actually talked about this in our series on the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 1, we hit firstborn language there—things that occasioned this kind of discussion.

If you remember back there (some of this is going to sound familiar—in fact, a lot of it is in some sections, but I think it bears repeating)... Here’s the key thought to take into what I say now: we need to frame a term like “firstborn” in its original Old Testament context. In other words, we look at “firstborn” and we think immediately (just because of “first” and “born”) of birth order—birth chronology. That is not often (and in some key passages that are directly messianic, that is not) the meaning of firstborn. Firstborn instead refers to preeminence or superiority, regardless of chronology. The focus is not chronological; the focus is status.

So let me give you a few examples. If you go back into the Old Testament, one of the first places—an early place—that you would see firstborn language is Exodus 4:22. It’s really an interesting instance, and it’s important. This is when Moses and Aaron are in front of Pharaoh—confronting Pharaoh—about letting Israel go, and God tells them, “Here’s what your message is going to be. You shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Israel is my firstborn son.”’” Israel, corporately, the nation (this collective people) is my firstborn son.

Let’s ask ourselves some questions. Was Israel God’s chronologically first human creation? Well, of course not. There was Adam, then there’s lots of people after Adam. And even with respect to the history of Israel itself, there was Abraham first. God is responsible for Abraham being alive. There are lots of people around that are traceable to the creative activity of God, and even divine intervention in Abraham’s case, producing Isaac. Isaac is before the nation of Israel because it’s going to be from Isaac, whose birth is supernatural, that the rest of the people of Israel come. So why in the world would God call Israel his firstborn if it can’t be chronology? Well, it’s because of status. The designation with respect to this group is one of priority. It’s one of preeminence, status, election, God’s choice, God’s will (however you want to understand that). When God forsakes the nations at Babel, he turns around and calls Abram (whose name will be Abraham later) and makes a covenant with him and says, “Through you, your seed, your offspring, and I know you and your wife are too old to have kids, blah blah blah, you’re perfect, because I’m going to do it supernaturally...” And he does, “But it’s going to be through *your* offspring that all these other nations that I’ve disinherited will be blessed.” So the nation produced from that supernatural intervention on behalf of Sarah (Abraham’s wife) is going to be called, collectively, “Israel.” They’re not chronologically the first humans, or even the first where God intervenes directly. That would be Adam and then you have

Abraham and Sarah's situation. They produce Israel. So it's clearly a term... To call Israel the firstborn means they're special. They have special status. They're the ones now who are going to be Yahweh's portion (Deuteronomy 32:9), Yahweh's inheritance on the Earth, and they're going to be the means by which all the other nations come back into relationship with Yahweh. This is familiar *Unseen Realm* stuff, hopefully, for you.

20:00

So "firstborn" is clearly, at times, a title of preeminence, having nothing to do with chronology. Now, significantly (think about it), we have a "firstborn" reference to the nation that conveys preeminence and status. Significantly, that's not the only time we get this. And on one hand, in Exodus 4, we have the nation being referred to this way. If you go to Psalm 89, you have Israel's king (the Davidic king) being referred to this way. Now, the Davidic covenant... God gives the covenant to David in 2 Samuel 7. If you read 2 Samuel 7, you're not going to get the term "firstborn" there, but you will when the covenant is repeated in Psalm 89—specifically in Psalm 89:27. But I'm going to read you verses 20-29, where God is the speaker, and he's talking about David and his dynasty. Now listen to this:

- ²⁰ **I have found David, my servant;
with my holy oil I have anointed him,**
- ²¹ **so that my hand shall be established with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.**
- ²² **The enemy shall not outwit him;
the wicked shall not humble him.**
- ²³ **I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.**
- ²⁴ **My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.**
- ²⁵ **I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.**
- ²⁶ **He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'**
- ²⁷ **And I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.**
- ²⁸ **My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.**
- ²⁹ **I will establish his offspring forever
and his throne as the days of the heavens.**

That's Psalm 89:20-29. David is not chronologically the first human. We're well into Israel's history. We're past Israel, corporately. We're past the Exodus period, where we get the first "firstborn" reference that we talked about. It's very clearly a term of status and preeminence.

**²⁷ And I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.**

There are other kings, and they're not in David's family; they're just kings of all these other nations. So what does it mean to call David the "firstborn?" He's not even the first king of Israel. What does it mean to call him the "firstborn?" It's not chronology. It's status and preeminence.

So we need to think about this Old Testament context. We've got the "firstborn" (the preeminent son, as it were) used of the nation. The preeminent son, as it were, used of the king—the Davidic king—in the Old Testament. *This* is the context for reading Paul's reference to Jesus as "firstborn." It is not about chronology. Paul uses the "firstborn" language in three places: Colossians 1:15 (which is where we are), Colossians 1:18 (which we'll get to in a moment)—"firstborn from the dead," and Romans 8:29, "firstborn among many brothers."

Now, "firstborn of creation"... If the term is about preeminence, what does it mean? It's kind of simple. It means Christ is preeminent over creation as its creator, as the agent of creation for everything else. Now, Hawthorne, in his *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, says this:

The English word *firstborn* is misleading for it normally suggests someone who is born and therefore created. But this cannot be the significance of the term here since the immediately following words (Col 1:16...)

Let me just read you that again:

¹⁶ For by him *all things* were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

He says it can't be referring to being created here, because of what follows (Colossians 1:16):

...which provides a commentary on the title, emphasizing the point that [Christ] is the one by whom the whole creation [remember, all things visible and invisible—the creation of the material and the spiritual world] came into being. There are no exceptions, for absolutely everything in creation has been made by him.

25:00

So it distinguishes Christ as creator from the creation. And by doing this, he is the one who is seen as the preeminent... He's preeminent over creation. He's superior to it. So consequently, "firstborn" doesn't mean Jesus is chronologically the first thing created. Yes, people can say that, and they do (Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, whatever). You can say that, but if you say that, you're missing (either intentionally or accidentally) the relationship of Christ to two things that are in the Old Testament that are called firstborn. You're missing the relationship of Christ the Messiah to Israel corporately (God's corporate firstborn son) and his relationship to the Davidic dynasty (God's singular Davidic firstborn son). So this is how we need to read this.

Those things—that Old Testament stuff—that is the context for understanding the term. I can't help it if today's readers and today's teachers (pseudo-scholars, or whatever)... I can't help that they don't get the context or they don't want to see it. I can't help even if certain people in the history of the early Church forgot the Old Testament context or didn't want to see it. That honestly isn't my problem. There's nothing I can do about that. But I can say that *that is* the context. We're framing a term by virtue of the Old Testament. This is what Paul does all the time. This is his method, especially when he talks about Jesus—to link him back into the Old Testament. It's going to become important for other reasons here, that he's referencing Old Testament stuff in regard to the bigger picture of the Colossian Heresy we talked about when we introduced the epistle.

So that's the context. There's really no other way to say it. I can even press the point further. If you actually take the content of verse 16 (we might as well throw this in):

¹⁶ 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.

If we throw that in, as I've written about in *Unseen Realm*, these dominions, rulers, authorities, thrones—these are spiritual entities. These are terms of geographical rulership applied to supernatural beings. And if you want to get the information there, go read *Unseen Realm*. You'll get it. He's referring to the spiritual world and the physical world—everything. That's an all-encompassing kind of thing. Everything that *is* was created by this one—this agent of creation—so he is preeminent over creation. He isn't the first created thing and then he creates all the others. He is preeminent. Firstborn is not about chronology. It's not about chronology when God calls Israel his firstborn; it's not about chronology when he calls David the firstborn, the highest of the rulers of the earth. It's not about chronology. It's about superiority, preeminence.

Now if Paul had in the room while he's writing this someone who was a Jew, or at least had a strong Jewish orientation, maybe through the Septuagint, when they

heard Paul or saw him write (however, he's using an amanuensis or whatever)... When they saw the content of verse 16 (the claim that Christ was the creator of all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible), they couldn't help but think of Christ in the place of God. Why? Because in the Old Testament, it's God who creates all that stuff. Just a couple of passages: Nehemiah 9:6:

⁶ “You are the Lord [Yahweh], you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.

We not only have the celestial heaven, we have the heaven of heavens. This is a way that you would refer to the spiritual world: “And everything in them, all things visible and invisible.” Well, who creates them, in the Old Testament? Yahweh. Who creates them in Colossians 1? Jesus. You can't help but make this association. Psalm 148:1-5 says:

**Praise the LORD [YAHWEH]!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his hosts!
³ Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars!
⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!
⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD!
For he commanded and they were created.**

Who creates all those things? Who creates all the things we see in the skies and all the things we can't see that are up there (spiritual world language)? Who creates all things visible and invisible? In the Old Testament, the answer is Yahweh. Here in Colossians 1, it's Jesus. The math isn't hard here. It's just that a lot of people don't want to see it. They want to take a term like “firstborn” and think it's chronology. They won't consider Exodus 4:22. They won't consider Psalm 89:27, because that ruins their argument. But that is the context for what Paul is saying. Now, O'Brien, in his Colossians commentary in the *Word Biblical* series, says this about this language:

Probably [this language has] special reference to the Colossian heresy Paul now emphasizes that even the cosmic powers and principalities, which apparently received some prominence in that heresy, were created in Christ. Good or bad, all

30:00

are subject to him as Creator. No doubt it is the hostile rather than the friendly powers Paul has particularly in view as he endeavors to show the Colossians their proper place in relation to Christ (Bruce, 198). And the argument he develops in chapter 2 is that they [these hostile powers—we'll get to that] were vanquished through that same Lord. None needs to be placated. They derive their existence from him, and they owe their obedience to him through whom they have been conquered (2:10, 15).

We'll get to those passages, but I think O'Brien's point is really worthwhile—that if you've been embroiled in this heresy, whatever it is, whatever the exact nature of it is... We know roughly what it is, but precisely... that's where the academic discussion takes place. These hostile powers got some cred, they got some preeminence, they were feared, whatever. And Paul, by referring to Jesus in these ways that we've been talking about, puts those powers in their place. He puts them in the right pecking order in terms of status. Christ is superior. He's preeminent. There is no higher authority. He is their creator. They owe him obedience. They are inferior by definition. They are contingent; he is not. The message would've been unmistakable for Paul's opponents.

Now, let's jump in to 17, 18, and 19. I'll read these three verses.

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ 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.

It's pretty clear. You see the preeminence theme again. There it is. Even when talking about the *dead*, Jesus gets special status. Christ is preeminent among the dead, in death, because he's the indispensable figure with respect to the resurrection of the dead. He's unique. He's special. He's superior. He's different. He's preeminent, even when you talk about the dead. So verse 19:

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...

Now, these phrases, "before all things," "in him all things hold together," this "firstborn from the dead," and specifically here in verse 19, "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"... these phrases remind us of language in Hebrews, which in turn takes us back to the Old Testament Wisdom motif, or personification—Wisdom as God's co-creator. We covered this in a previous episode on Hebrews 1:1-4. That was episode 175. We've covered it before, but I'm going to do some repetition here. Now, think about these phrases. I'm going to read them again. Here are the important ones, or the ones I'm going to camp on. In Colossians 1:17 and 19, Christ is described this way:

- He's prior to all created things.
- In Him all things hold together.
- In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

And you can throw the preeminence idea in there, as well.

In Hebrews 1:1-4, here's what we get:

- Christ is the radiance of the glory of God.
- He's the exact representation of his being or his nature.
- He is the upholder or sustainer of all things.

35:00

Now, there's a considerable amount of overlap—conceptual overlap—between those phrases in Colossians, where we are now, and those things in the first few verses of Hebrews, which we covered quite a while ago. Just as the language of Hebrews 1 took us back into the Wisdom traditions of the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism, so the language of Colossians takes us back into the same Second Temple Wisdom traditions. The language used of God and Wisdom in the Old Testament and in the Second Temple period (specifically Wisdom—that's going to be the important one here)... The language used of Wisdom, who of course has to be an attribute of God, has to essentially be God in some way. Wisdom, God's necessarily ever-present agent of creation, is applied to Christ. All that language, all that thought, those concepts, get glommed on to Jesus. We talked about this with Hebrews 1 and we're going to talk about it again here.

Now, just so that you know that this isn't just Mike, I wanted to quote a section from Dunn's commentary. This is his commentary on the epistle to the Colossians and Philemon. It's the *New International Greek Testament Commentary*. He has this to say. This will be kind of a warm-up. But I realize for some in the audience, you might not know what we're talking about when we talk about Wisdom traditions, so don't despair; I'll explain it as we continue through the rest of the episode here. But it's really important to understand what's going on here. Now, Dunn writes in relation to the word "fullness," so in verse 19, "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Dunn has an interesting comment on "fullness," which is the Greek word *plērōma*. He writes:

In itself [this word] denotes completeness, as in the regular Greek use of it for a ship's crew (a full complement, LSJ) or in the repeated phrase in LXX, "the earth and its fullness (all that is in it)" (e.g., Ps. 24:1 [LXX 23:1]; Jer. 8:16; Ezek. 19:7; 30:12).

His point is that "fullness" there means "everything," "nothing lacking," "everything."

A more cosmological usage as such is not attested before this time [MH: Before Paul's time, and even before the Septuagint, obviously, going backwards.]; the word is never taken up in this [cosmological] by Philo, usually a sure guide to contemporary philosophical usage in the wider Hellenistic world. However, the idea of God or his Spirit as filling the world is another way of expressing the divine rationality that permeates the world in Stoic thought (Seneca; Aelius Aristides). And again, as we might now expect in the light of our findings in the first strophe [the first part of the verse], the same language was used in Hellenistic Judaism of divine Wisdom. Thus in [Wisdom of Solomon] 1:6–7: "Wisdom is a kindly spirit... Because the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world." And Philo quite frequently uses similar phrases, "God (who) has filled/fills all things" (e.g., *Legum Allegoriae* 3:4; *De gigantibus* 47; *De confusione linguarum* 136; *De Vita Mosis* 2.238). At the same time, we should not attribute the conceptuality solely to the influence of wider (Stoic) thought, since it is already present [in the Old Testament] in Jer. 23:24 ("Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord") and Ps. 139:7... The theme, then [the idea of the fullness/*plērōma* of God], is traditionally Jewish...

Let me just stop there. That's going to become important, because *plērōma* is a classic term for Gnosticism. The fullness—the collective assemblage of the aeons, together—is the *plērōma*. And they together, collectively, represent the "true God," who is not the God of the Old Testament in Gnostic thought. But as we talked about in the first episode introducing Colossians, that systematized thought is yet in the future. It's not around in Paul's day. That's why he said even Philo doesn't mess around with the term like the Gnostics, like this cosmological sense is going to come later. And it's important that Dunn says, "Philo is usually a good guide to what philosophers are talking about in his own day, and he never brings this up." So it's a good indication that the *plērōma*, in terms of what's going to become Gnosticism, is not present yet in the first century. That's important (going back to our introduction to the whole epistle). So the context for this is going to be Hellenistic Judaism, and that's going to take us right back into the Wisdom traditions. So back to Dunn, he says here:

40:00

The theme, then, is traditionally Jewish and is wholly of a piece with the Wisdom tradition, which was so powerfully influential in the first strophe. The only difference is one of emphasis and metaphor, "wisdom" denoting the mature, personal rationality that permeates creation and "fullness" the impersonal completeness of that permeation, that is, completeness both of God's commitment to creation and of the extent of his presence throughout creation. It was the potency of this imagery ("fullness") that presumably made the term *πλήρωμα* [*plērōma*] so attractive to later Gnostic use to denote the completeness of spiritual being emanating from the hidden God, the perfection of the highest spiritual realm.

So why go through all of this? We need to talk about the Wisdom traditions. If this is new to you, just hang on; you'll get it. Let's start it this way. I'm going to go back to some of the Hebrews language first, and then we'll link it back into Colossians. The key verse here that gets the ball rolling is Proverbs 8:22, where Wisdom is described in Proverbs 8:22 and following as kind of an entity. And Wisdom, earlier in the chapter and earlier in the book of Proverbs, is cast as a female figure. So she (we have feminine pronouns used of her) is at God's side. God has brought her forth, produced her, brought her onto the scene, and she functions as God's agent of creation. She is his workman while he creates the foundations of the world, and all this stuff. So there's a number of ways you can talk about the language, and if you want to get the bigger discussion, go back to episode 175.

But Paul and other New Testament writers were aware of Proverbs 8, obviously (they read their Old Testament), and they were aware of how Proverbs 8 got talked about in the Jewish community in this intertestamental (also known as the Second Temple period). So Paul and other New Testament writers are fully aware of that, and whoever wrote Hebrews is really tracking on it in the first few verses of Hebrews when he describes Jesus as "the radiance of the glory of God." Now the word "radiance" there, *apaugasma*, occurs only in Hebrews 1:3—no other place in the New Testament. It is an exceedingly rare term also outside of the New Testament. In the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it occurs only once there. It's very, very rare. So to figure out what the writer of Hebrews was thinking when he used the word *apaugasma* of Jesus—this radiance—we have to look at his source, and there's only one possible source, and that's this one reference in the Septuagint. The writer of Hebrews was quoting the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). But the Septuagint, we have to remember, included books that are not in our Protestant Old Testaments. And in one of those books that isn't in our Old Testament, that's actually the book that the writer of Hebrews quotes from and draws this word, *apaugasma*. It's the Wisdom of Solomon. The quotation there in Hebrews comes from the Wisdom of Solomon, and we can be sure because that's the only place the word occurs in Second Temple Greek stuff. It's very rare. The Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 is where the word occurs. I'm going to read you the Wisdom of Solomon 7:24-26 just to give you a flavor here. The writer of that book says:

For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.

For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. [MH: Wisdom is pure.]

For she is a reflection [*apaugasma*] of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.

So Wisdom is *apaugasma* and the image of God. Who does that remind you of? And if you're a reader of the New Testament, you're thinking "Jesus" already. If you're in Hebrews 1, of course you're thinking "Jesus" right away, because that's how Hebrews starts out, that God has given us the revelation of his Son.

Wisdom is also mentioned other places in Second Temple Jewish texts. Sirach 24:1-3, 22, says this:

45:00

Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people. In the assembly of the Most High [MH: in the Divine Council] she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory: 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist'... All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us" (NRSV).

Wisdom of Solomon 9:1, 4, 10, 18. I'll just splatter them all together here. This is a Jew writing this, that God has a co-ruler: Wisdom.

God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy... give me the wisdom that sits by your throne... Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her... that I may learn what is pleasing to you... and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom. (NRSV)

Now we get salvation by wisdom. Isn't that interesting? The Jewish writer of the Wisdom of Solomon and these other texts... they got their idea of personified Wisdom as a woman from the book of Proverbs. While the term most often refers to (in Proverbs) practical insight for living, the writer of Proverbs at times portrays Wisdom as a woman. It's anthropomorphic. It's personified. So we get references to *her* voice, and *she* does this, and so on and so forth. Proverbs 8:22 is sort of the core text:

The LORD [Yahweh] brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began... before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth... I was there when he [God] set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep... Then I was the craftsman at his side (NIV).

The wording here echoes Proverbs 3:19, where we read:

By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations; by understanding he set the heavens in place (NIV).

Wisdom, personified as a woman, is cast as God's agent of creation. That's the point. Now, why the feminine language? I'm not going to rabbit-trail too much on this. You can go to www.thedivinecouncil.com and scroll down the right-hand side for my paper on "Jesus and Wisdom," and get a longer explanation. The feminine pronouns are because the word wisdom in Hebrew (*hokmah*) is grammatically feminine. It's a feminine noun. So it's about grammatical agreement; it's not about literal biological gender. Because spirit things don't have literal biological gender, because they are *spirits*—they don't have bodies.

This passage—this whole subject—became a real focal point of debates about Christology in the early Church. And some, like the Arians, wanted to say, "Well, Wisdom had to be created. Look at this language in Proverbs 8." And people like Athanasius stepped forward and made a pretty obvious point: If this is a personification of God's attribute (and everybody agrees that it is), then there can't be a time when Wisdom was not, because that would mean God lacked wisdom at some point, and in fact, he lacked wisdom before he was smart enough to say, "Hey, I need Wisdom to be my co-creator." How does that work? It doesn't. It produces an absurdity. There cannot be a time when God lacked wisdom; therefore, Wisdom has to be eternal. And the language of eternity is used in the passage, as well. If you were listening carefully, you caught it.

God's attributes, by the way, are not separable and dispensable. You can't chop one off and still have God. They are intrinsically intertwined in their fullness. So Wisdom must be eternal. And if Wisdom is this second figure... See, now you're getting into this second figure idea that I talk about in *Unseen Realm* for five or six chapters (this Second Yahweh figure thing going on—a Godhead idea—developing, seeping through these passages). That's why it's applied to Jesus. Because Jesus *is* the Wisdom of God. Paul actually calls him that. I'll read you a little bit from the older episode on Hebrews, and this is taken from something that I wrote (the document on thedivinecouncil.com). I wrote this:

Jesus as Wisdom

There are several instances in the New Testament where Jesus is identified in some way with Wisdom. 1 Cor 1:24 is considered by some an explicit statement to that effect since Paul refers to Jesus as the "Wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). However, it is not completely clear that Paul meant to identify Jesus with the Wisdom of Proverbs 8 in that statement in light of his wording in verse 30: "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

There are other nouns listed there, so some scholars say it's not really clear that Paul is talking about personified Wisdom. I get it; I understand it. That's why I

50:00

think that Luke 11:49-51 (this passage in the Synoptics is going to be Luke and Matthew), I think it's a lot more striking. Now, I'm going to read Luke 11. I'm going to start in verse 46, and then when I jump to the parallel passage in the other Synoptic, you'll see why this is really striking. Jesus is speaking. Jesus said:

⁴⁶ And he said, "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute.'

Now, if you actually look at the passage from which that's taken, the speaker is God, but Jesus refers to the Wisdom of God as God, and God as the Wisdom of God. Isn't that interesting? Well, it gets even more interesting when you go down to the parallel in Matthew. Matthew 23—same incident, same context, same audience, same speaker. Jesus is speaking. I'll start in verse 29. Jesus said:

²⁹ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. ³³ You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? ³⁴ Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town...

Now, Jesus quotes the passage, but he leaves out the attribution. Now Matthew creates this interesting ambiguity for the reader. You could go back and look at the Old Testament and say, "That's God speaking," but you could look at what Matthew said, and he omits the third person reference so that Jesus is saying, "I send you prophets and wise men," so Matthew is linking Jesus to God. This is familiar in the New Testament. New Testament writers do this a lot. They insert Jesus into "God slots" of Old Testament verses. That's common, but what isn't common is in this case, if you compare the two passages, Wisdom is part of that mix. Wisdom is identified with God, and therefore identified with Jesus, as well. It's hard to escape what these writers are doing. They want the readers, when they think "Jesus," to think "God." And in this case, they also want them to think

“Wisdom.” This is what they do. This is their method of trying to get their readers to recall other texts and other traditions so that they can do theology with their readers, and the readers can do theology in their heads.

So what’s the point? Well, for Hebrews 1, the Son is the *apaugasma* of God—the description found in only one other place, of Wisdom, the breath of God, who’s in the Divine Council, who has a throne next to God’s. And this is where the book of Hebrews puts Jesus: seated next to God at the right hand of God. He’s the co-ruler; he’s the co-king, the co-regent. Jesus is the Wisdom that came forth from God before the foundation of the world, and was the creative agent—God’s agent of creation. And that’s also what Paul’s trying to do.

So all of that stuff is important for the book of Hebrews. It’s also important for the book of Colossians. And if you caught the reference in the one Second Temple passage, Wisdom is equated with the Word and the Law. For the Jews, Wisdom was the Torah, and Torah was actually eternal, before it was ever even written down. So the Jewish community elevated Torah to this mystical status of being equal with God—the Torah, the five books of Moses. Well, when Paul and the writer of Hebrews says, “No, no, no... Wisdom is Jesus.” That means Jesus is superior to Torah as well. [laughs]

55:00

This is really important for Colossians. While Paul isn’t addressing full-blown Gnosticism, later Church Fathers would find his theology useful for addressing Gnostic stuff. That’s true. But Paul had Jewish opponents at Colossae. Remember our introductory episode? There are strands of Jewish mystical thought that would later work their way into what we call Gnosticism. And it’s this mystical theology—elevation of other supernatural beings, other gods, other powers, angels, whatever... This is what Paul’s dealing with in relation to Jewish mysticism. But then he also has Judaizers—people who want the Gentiles to convert to being Jews. They want to go back to the Law. And in one fell swoop, when he refers to Jesus as firstborn, when he refers to Jesus as the agent of creation, when he refers to Jesus as having the fullness of God in him, these are all phrases that a literate Jew... The people who are teaching what they teach in the synagogues, that are opposing Paul—they’re literate Jews. They know that Paul is equating Jesus with God and with Wisdom, and both of those acts—both of those strategies—make Jesus not only superior to any other being that they might be into, in terms of adoration or worship or just thought they were cool (other entities)... Not only is Jesus superior to them, but he’s also superior to Torah. In one fell swoop, Paul gives two pokes in the eye. He’s poking the mystics in the eye, and he’s poking the Judaizers in the eye with the same language. Jesus is superior to Torah. He’s also superior to all the rulers and the powers, and all this other stuff, because he is their God. He is their creator. There isn’t much that Paul could do more compactly to poke his opponents in the eye (and, of course infuriate them) than this. He does it. He knows exactly what to say to set them off, and also to address what they’re saying.

Today (without going on rabbit trails, since I have a lot of this stuff floating around in my head) when I hear about the more radical Hebrew Roots stuff, I just shake my head. Its like, "Come on, people. Don't you have any context for what you're reading? It's not about becoming a Jew again." This is precisely what Paul said *wasn't* necessary and what Paul, in some of the more extreme cases, said was heretical. We have to have our pecking order correct here. Jesus is preeminent, not Torah. Torah's a good thing. Paul praised the Torah in a number of passages. Okay. But he had the priorities correct. He had his theology correct. He knew what was number one, and what was number two. So we don't want to reverse that or make them co-equal. And when Paul does what he's doing here, when he says what he's saying here, he's going after those kinds of ideas.

Now, let's talk a little bit more about Colossians 1:19, as we veer toward the... Well, there's one other thing I want to throw in here, presuming we have time. Well, I'll just take time, because it's going to relate to a favorite debate topic in the Naked Bible Group, about the redemption of angels. So I'm going to throw it in, even though we're getting a bit long. Before we leave Colossians 1:19, I want to add one other thing: the idea of the fullness of God dwelling in him. That sounds a lot like Hebrews 1:3, as well, not just the *apaugasma* stuff, but Jesus being the exact representation of God's being or nature. Again, they're very similar in terms of their thematic content. N.T. Wright, I thought, had a nice little quote here in his Tyndale commentary on Colossians. He says:

There is no word for 'God' in the original of verse 19...

It's just "in him, the fullness was pleased to dwell." Wright points out that in the original, you don't have the word God there.

...but the grammatical subject ('fulness') must be a circumlocution for "God in all his fulness" (see 2:9).

That's an academic for saying "a roundabout way of referring to God." So Wright writes that this must be a circumlocution for "God in all his fulness," and he points us to Colossians 2:9 for that alternative phrasing.

It is appropriate that Christ should hold pre-eminence, because God in all his fullness was pleased to take up permanent residence (this is the best way of taking the Greek verb) in him. The full divinity of the man Jesus is stated without any implication that there are two Gods.

They're the same. Even though we have a *Godhead*, we don't have two separate, distinct deities that are not the same; we don't have tritheism or bitheism. Trinitarianism and binitarianism are different than those things. So Wright's saying, we don't have two separate deities, like they're not the same in essence.

1:00:00

It is the one God, in all his fullness, who dwells in him.

So we don't have all the persons dwelling in Jesus. It's the Son—that particular part of the Trinity—that dwells in Jesus. All this stuff is familiar to Christianity. Wright is writing in the Christian tradition, obviously—the old Bishop of Durham, and all that stuff. So I just thought it was kind of helpful to point out that the *fullness* idea here. And the way the “pleased to dwell” phrase works is that God's fullness—the fullness of God—takes up residence in the person that his contemporaries knew as Jesus of Nazareth. And it's the incarnation.

So lastly, in verse 20, let's jump there. This'll be our last verse, but we're going to take a bit of a rabbit trail here, too, for the sake of our Naked Bible Group. We read this:

²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

So God and Jesus are working together to bring reconciliation through the work of the Cross. This is familiar Christian stuff. Now what is less familiar (and those in the Naked Bible Group, at least a good number of you, will know already where I'm going with this)... There's a point of interest here. This verse (this idea of reconciling to himself all things) has been applied in the past to the argument that the devil and fallen divine beings can be redeemed. The reasoning is, if the verse says that the cross happened to reconcile *all* things, “whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross,” then the angels must be able to be redeemed, and they must, in fact, *be* redeemed in the end. So the question is, is angelic redemption in view in Colossians 1:20?

Now, what I'm going to do here, for expediency, really, and to make the best time I can, is I'm going to quote from my forthcoming *Angels* book. The *Angels* book is going to be out in September, so it won't be too long yet, but I have a section on angelic redemption in one of the chapters. (I think it's chapter 7, but don't quote me here). I'm going to quote from that book (the forthcoming *Angels* book) in this regard. In the course of the book, I had been talking about Revelation 1:3 (the messengers, the angels there) and then I go into Colossians 1. So here's where we'll start:

While Revelation 1-3 does not confirm that fallen angels are offered redemption, Col 1:19-20 has been utilized to justify that idea:

¹⁹ For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself (*eis auton*) all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Most scholars would acknowledge that “all things, whether on earth or in heaven,” includes the heavenly host. Given that assumption, the issue that requires consideration is the meaning of “reconcile” and “making peace” through the cross. Most readers presume that this language refers to the forgiveness of sins, but that is not the case. The idea of reconciliation is multi-faceted. For example, the work of Christ is connected to the renewal of creation. That has nothing to do with forgiving sins. Creation did not sin. It committed no moral offense against God. Hence its “reconciliation” (creation is of course included in “all things”) means something different than forgiveness of sin. O’Brien introduces his discussion of the passage with some salient observations

So I’m quoting from O’Brien here in my book:

1:05:00

The unusual feature of this passage is that it refers to the reconciliation of “all things” (τὰ πάντα; *ta panta*) and that as a *past* event. Although 2 Corinthians 5:19 (cf. John 3:16 and similar passages) speaks of the reconciliation of the world (κόσμος; *kosmos*), it is clear that it is the world of men which is in view. Further, it is argued that the freeing of creation from its bondage to decay so that it obtains the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:19–21) is a *future* eschatological event. Three related questions, therefore, arise: (a) What is the meaning of the phrase “to reconcile all things to him” . . . (b) What is the relationship of this expression to the words which follow, “having made peace through the blood of his cross” . . . (c) Is it possible or even desirable to equate verse 20 with the notion of God’s leading the evil powers in his triumphal procession at chapter 2:15?

Colossians 2:15 we’ll get to in a moment. So O’Brien asks those three questions:

- What does “reconcile” mean?
- How does that work with the blood of the cross, having made peace (*shalom*)?
- Does this verse (Colossians 1:20) have some connection to Colossians 2:15, where the rulers and authorities and powers are defeated by the Lord by the act of the crucifixion and the resurrection and the ascension?

That last point is important. All three are important, but that last one is really important, so let’s continue. Back to my own book here, I say:

Two points are especially crucial for accurate parsing of the question about angelic redemption. First, the reconciliation of which Col 1:20 speaks is a *past* event. Many who presume the passage is about the offer of salvation now being

open to angels fail to grasp this point as it derives from Greek grammar and syntax. One scholar explains:

Eis auton (to him) here does not indicate the completion of “imminent” reconciliation, and thus does not indicate a futuristic occurrence. The expression, which is construed in the aorist tense, “all things are reconciled *with him*,” is to be interpreted as a parallel construction to the expression in [the first stanza of Col 1:16], “all things were created in him,” and its special significance derives from there. It signifies, as the use of the aorist shows, the fulfillment of the corresponding expression in 1:16. Accordingly, reconciliation has its foundation in the creation and is now arriving at its completion in the dominion of the Son over all things.

Let me just stop there and unpack that a little bit. The source there is saying that “Reconciling all things to himself” is an aorist tense. It’s a past event, it’s completed, it’s a snapshot action. That derives its meaning from the other instance of *eis auton* (“to himself” or “in him”) in Colossians a few verses earlier. And that one had to do with creation. So whatever the reconciliation we’re talking about here is, it has something to do with creation order and the creation order being reset or restored at the event of the cross and the resurrection and the ascension of Christ to the right hand of God. It’s not about a future offer or an impending offer of salvation to anybody. Okay? Let’s go back to the *Angels* book.

The point is that the statements in Col 1:16 (“all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, were created by him”) must be understood in tandem with Col 1:20 (“all things, whether on earth or in heaven, are reconciled to/with him”) [MH: again, those two verses need to work together]. Both statements are in the same paragraph unit, and both verbs are aorist tense, the Greek tense which focuses on completed action—not action in process, or action yet unaccomplished...

The link of the reconciliation talk of Col 1:20 (and the original creation order) to Colossians 1:16, which talks about the kingship of the Son...

That relationship is derived from or reinforced from Colossians 2:15, which says that at the resurrection [the cross event and the ensuing resurrection and ascension], “by those things, he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.” All these verses (Colossians 1:16, Colossians 1:20, Colossians 2:15) need to be understood together. They are pieces of a mosaic. They form the whole picture. They inform one another. Scripture interprets scripture. We don’t pluck one out and give it the meaning we want it to have. Scripture interprets scripture. The basis... You’ve got to understand all of these things together.

1:10:00

The implications of connecting Col 1:20 with Col 1:16 and Col 2:15 is that “reconciliation” does not mean an offer of forgiveness that is still on the table. It means something else. In accord with Col 1:16, 20, all the verb forms in Col 2:15 are aorist and therefore describe a real condition that is completed. The “reconciliation” that is being described in Col 1:20 must be defined as an already completed reality that is consistent with both original creation order and the kingship of the risen Christ.

I’m going to read that sentence again, because it’s important, about the reconciliation that is described in Col 1:20 (that’s the verse that is used to argue that the fallen angels can be redeemed... “even the devil can be redeemed”):

The reconciliation that is being described in Colossians 1:20 must be defined as an already-completed reality that is consistent with both original creation order and the kingship of the risen Christ.

Colossians 1:20 needs to be interpreted by virtue of Colossians 1:16 and Colossians 2:15. Scripture interprets scripture.

Of the various suggestions made by scholars for understanding the meaning of reconciliation in Col 1:20, there is only one that both acknowledges supernatural beings must be included and that remains true to the verse’s relationship to Col 1:16; 2:15. Eduard Lohse articulates the meaning of reconciliation in concert with these contexts:

Although there has been no previous mention of it, it is presupposed here that unity and harmony of the cosmos have suffered a considerable disturbance, even a rupture. In order to restore the cosmic order reconciliation became necessary and was accomplished by the Christ-event. Through Christ, God himself achieved this reconciling. The universe has been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back into their divinely created and determined order through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. Now the universe is again under its head and thereby cosmic peace has returned. This peace which God has established through Christ binds the whole universe together again into unity and underlines that the restored creation is reconciled with God. Contrary to apocalyptic expectations, peace is not something which will come only at the end of time; rather, it has already appeared in all things and the cosmic work of redemption has been done (cf. Phil. 2:10f.). As the one who reconciled the cosmos, Christ has entered his kingly rule. Because he is the mediator of reconciliation, he is therefore also praised as the mediator of creation, as Lord over the universe, over powers and principalities.

The point is that “reconciling all things in heaven and earth” in Col 1:20 refers to the restoration of creation order and authority.

It does not refer to an impending offer of salvation to fallen supernatural beings, or anybody else. It has nothing to do with that. So yeah, you can say that. You can say that and build a following, and get fans, and all that kind of stuff. You can say that, but know that when you do that, your exegetical method is deeply flawed and perhaps you’re not being honest. Scripture interprets scripture. Colossians 1:20 needs to be understood in relation to Colossians 1:16 and Colossians 2:15. That’s just the way it is. It’s just the way it is. The timing of this (that the reconciliation being described is defined as an already completed reality)—that derives from the grammar, not Mike. It derives from the grammar. The aorists are consistent through all three passages. The phrase “to himself” (*eis auton*) is consistent in the two Colossians 1 references. This is how we do exegesis. This is how we do biblical theology. We allow scripture to interpret scripture against its own backdrop. We don’t see a verse, think a thought, and then call it biblical theology, and then ride that pony. That’s not what we do. We let scripture interpret scripture.

1:15:00

So I wanted to throw that in at the end. We’re at verse 20 now, and we’ll wrap up the episode here, because this has been a great interest in the Naked Bible Group. And so, if you know somebody active in the group (maybe they’re not a faithful podcast listener), get them to listen to this episode, at least this part, and I think it’ll be helpful. So what we have in Colossians 1:13-20 (just to sum it up in a nutshell) is the exultation of Christ over whatever powers were being given status or worshipped at Colossae, whether by Gentiles or Hellenized Jews, or some other Jewish context (maybe converted to the worship of Jesus, to the Gospel, or not). Paul is saying Christ is superior to them, and Christ is superior to Torah. And it’s because of these phrases that he’s used linking Jesus back to Godhead language in the Old Testament—linking Jesus to Wisdom, the fullness idea, that it’s God or the Spirit that fills in Second Temple Jewish texts and in the Septuagint... He’s trying to paint Jesus with God strokes in a number of different ways, and the firstborn language that we began our episode with does not refer to chronology. That also refers to preeminence. So you can boil down verses 13-20 as “Christ is preeminent over any other supernatural power, anything in creation, and even the Torah itself.” Paul hits all the bases in this short section of verses.

TS: Alright, Mike, another good one, and we’re not even done with chapter 1 yet.

MH: Yeah, next time, we’ll get done with chapter 1. I think we’ll at least get to the fifth verse in Colossians 2, but we’ll see.

TS: With that, Mike, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.