

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

He Holds Everything Together

Colossians 1:16 – 17

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. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

This week we begin a home fellowship series from *Desiring God Ministries* called **God is the Gospel**. And we will see that the Bible makes it clear that God is the greatest gift of the Gospel and our highest and best enjoyment and satisfaction is God Himself. All the longings and aspirations of those who embrace the Gospel culminates in this one verse in Psalm 27: *"One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple"* Psalm 27:4.

But for many Christians, the Gospel is seen merely as the introduction to the Christian life – a starting point – a beginning. And once we have come to faith they have the idea that we somehow move away from the Gospel – we mature into other things. But I want to tell you this morning – that we will never outgrow the gospel – we will never see a time in our lives where the Gospel is irrelevant or no longer needed. It is the Gospel, Paul said that is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. That is not just a one-time transaction – we need saving all day long – all year long – all life-long. ***Embracing the Gospel removes the threat of eternal separation from God and punishment for our sins – believing in the Gospel brings us to Christ – but it is also the very power of God to bring us all the way to glory.***

The Gospel is our introduction to Christ and it is the sustainer of our faith in Christ. It is the Gospel that ignites hope in our hearts when circumstances are not encouraging. It is the Gospel of Christ that comforts our aching hearts when tragedy strikes and we lose things precious to us. It is the Good News that there is life beyond the grave where there are no more tears and no more crying that sustain us through the death of loved ones. It is the Gospel that encourages the glad anticipation that one day all our desires will be perfect and all our impulses will be pure and sin will not even be a distant memory and we will live life to the fullest. It is the Gospel that brings us to God, our Great Reward and teaches us to know Him – not just know about Him.

Knowing God is the end for which we are made – it is the summation of human life – this is what everything else is pointing toward. Jeremiah 9:23-24: *"Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.'*"

This is what we are to boast in – to glory in, to find our purpose in – knowing God. Don't look to anything else to supply satisfaction – don't look to wisdom or riches or power. Knowing God is where we ought to find our greatest significance – everything else in our lives must relate to this. ***The end of salvation is the knowledge of God.*** This is God's end goal for us. Nothing in our lives is more important than knowing God. And the author uses two distinct words that describe this kind of knowledge: ***'Understand and know'*** he says. To ***understand*** is to have the ***objective factual knowledge*** of God; and to ***know*** indicates an ***intimate relational knowledge of God***. We need both - we cannot have intimate relational knowledge of God, without first having a grasp of the objective factual knowledge. Otherwise how do we know with whom it is we are being intimate?

One troubling example of this is the novel that is jumping like hotcakes off the bookshelves this summer called ***The Shack***. In this novel, the author tries to answer some of the tough theological questions of pain and suffering and the presences of evil in the world by giving his readers his understanding of who God is and how He operates in this world. And the protagonist in the story is brought from grief and despair and alienation from God to hope and joy and an intimate relationship with Him. The only problem is that the God of this novel is clearly not the God of the Bible, but rather an image cooked up in the author's own imagination of what he thinks God is like. He is lacking the objective, Biblical, factual knowledge of God – and ends up leading undiscerning readers astray.

I have written a review of this book – the first one I have ever done – mainly because of its wide acceptance in the Christian community. In fact, the pastor of one of the largest churches in Tacoma has recommended this book to his congregation from his pulpit. I also want to make a recommendation – don't read it – it's not worth your time if you are a believer, and it won't bring you to God if you are not.

And so Paul writes a letter to the Corinthians who had, in many respects, moved away from even the understanding of God, from the clear, plain Gospel that brought them to God, and began to develop strange ideas of who Christ was and who God was and how things worked in this universe. They had elevated angels and cultic beliefs and rules about eating and drinking and ascetic practices above knowing Christ. And so Paul writes to give them this transcendent view of Christ so that they might know Him.

And a couple of weeks ago, we started into Paul's great hymn of Christ's supremacy in chapter one, beginning with verse 15: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* Colossians 1:15 First of all, **Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.** He is the God-Man. If He were only man, then He is irrelevant to our thought of God. If He were only God, then He is irrelevant to our experience of human life. Jesus, the incarnation of God, God in the flesh, shows us what God is. And as a man, He shows us what man was meant to be.

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. Colossians 1:16 **All that has come into being exists to display the greatness of Christ.** Nothing in this universe exists for its own sake. It is all for Him – all for Jesus. All the suns and all the planets and all the galaxies and all the black holes and all the mountains and rivers and deserts and seas, all the things that fly and all the things that crawl and all the things that swim and all the things that have breath and all the things that don't. All of this is for Him. **All that has come into being exists to display the greatness of Christ.** Right down to the smallest bit of matter or anti-matter.

We dealt with the last part of that phrase the last time we looked at this: *'whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through Him and for Him,* and understood that all things created through Him and for Him had great implications concerning the sovereignty of God. That is, the very fact that Christ is the creator of these rulers and authorities means that those very entities are entirely subject to Him and that **nothing is outside His control – nothing can thwart His will – nothing can effectively oppose His eternal purpose.** But today I want to take a brief look at the first part of this verse *'For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible'* and its implications for us.

As we all are painfully aware, the leading scientific theory in the world today, as to the origin of all that we see in this universe, is the theory of evolution – simply stated: **from the goo through the zoo to you.** Life as we know it evolved through billions of years of random, uncontrolled events, and the fact that you are sitting here today is a result of pure chance. **And at the very core of this theory is the blatant rejection of a transcendent God who created everything.** Let me show you in the evolutionist's own words what that looks like. Arthur Keith said: *'Evolution is unproved and unprovable. We believe it only because the only alternative is special creation, and that is unthinkable.'* [Arthur Keith] The only alternative to the best idea of men is that God created the heavens and the earth – but that is 'unthinkable!'. And it is unthinkable because men want to rule themselves and are unwilling to submit to God. That is the only reason it is unthinkable.

Romans 1 tells us that unregenerate man's passion to rule himself and not be subject to his Creator will always lead him down these dark paths of ignorance. *'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.* Romans 1:19-23

One implication is that to reject creation is to reject Christ's authority. If you cannot affirm that all things – whether in heaven or on earth, visible or invisible – were created by God – then you are in effect, rejecting His authority over all things, denying His sovereignty over all things and refusing His Lordship over you. If Christ is not Lord of all creation, then He cannot be Lord over your soul. The search for alternative explanations of the origins of life is a rejection of the authority of Christ over your life.

Richard Dawkins, who recently wrote the *God Delusion* said: '*My argument will be that Darwinism is the only known theory that is in principle capable of explaining certain aspects of life... even if there were no actual evidence in favour of Darwinian theory...we should still be justified in preferring it over all rival theories.*' [Richard Dawkins] This is a lot like a jury, presented with no facts to support the case, still votes to convict – because they prefer to believe the defendant is guilty. Absurd! Even a five year-old knows better.

Monday our family and the Hamps took a hike to Tolmie Peak on Mt. Rainier and along the way we walked by a place in the trail that was shored up by some stones placed in a regular, orderly pattern. Clay, Jim's five year-old, exclaimed when he saw them, 'Who put that there?' I tried to explain to him that no one put them there, they just appeared as a result of a random sequence of events. He just looked at me as though I were some sort of idiot child who needed to be humored. And then he said, 'Somebody had to put them there like that.' Exactly. The evidence is clearly in favor of creation and the implication is that we are accountable to the Creator.

Another implication in rejecting creation is that everything in the universe reduced to meaningless, random events, and therefore we are not accountable to anyone. If there is no Creator, there is no plan, no purpose for our existence and therefore no reason why we should or shouldn't do what we want. One prominent evolutionist, Julian Huxley said this: '*[I suppose the reason] we all jumped at the Origin [Origin of Species – theory of evolution] was because the idea of God interfered with our sexual mores.*' [Sir Julian Huxley] I believe we are seeing in our society today the direct result of our schools teaching our children that there is no God, there is no Creator – only blind, random, meaningless chance – and it can only get worse.

The implications of this kind of thinking reverberates in every area of society. Education is affected. In 1963, the Supreme Court of the United States heard a First Amendment case which is now known as one that kicked God and prayer out of the schools. If there is no Creator, then why would we pray or read the Bible, much less teach our children to do so? And the graphs that plot the rise of teenage pregnancies, drug addiction, the spread of AIDS, and violence have shot up like rockets.

Medical care is affected. In 1973, the United States Supreme Court, in a 7-to-2 vote, decided that the human embryo growing within the human womb no longer is "human." Rather, it is a "thing" that may be ripped out, slaughtered, and tossed into the nearest garbage dump. This is a logical conclusion for those who have rejected the creation of all things by Christ. If every living thing is a product of random chance, why not choose abortion? And in 1998, the rebel state south of us adopted physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients. If God is not in control of things – why not check out when you want?

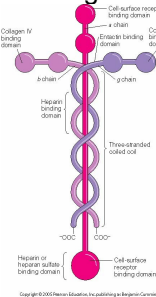
Morality is profoundly affected by this kind of thinking. In a recent book, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, authors Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer claim that rape is "a natural, biological phenomenon that is a product of the human evolutionary heritage," just like "the leopard's spots and the giraffe's elongated neck." In other words, rape is a biological "adaptation" that allows undesirable males the opportunity to pass on their genes. According to Randy Thornhill, "Every feature of every living thing, including human beings, has an underlying evolutionary background. That's not a debatable matter." According to the anthropology department at the University of California Santa Barbara, "That rape might be an adaptation is a reasonable hypothesis to pursue..." If rape is just an evolutionary adaptation, then how can it be immoral?

But if, on the other hand, we embrace the truth that all things were created by God, then all of life becomes a display of the greatness of Christ, and the goal of our salvation is to know Him – fully, accurately, intimately, completely. Paul goes on to say: *And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* Colossians 1:17 Not only was Christ the One through whom everything came into being, but this tells us that Christ was pre-existent – before the worlds began, He was. As God He stands outside of time and human existence – and as man He enters time and our world to carry out His purpose.

And this whole thing is held together in Him. **Everything in the universe is upheld and sustained by His hands.** He not only created it all – it all continues to exist through Him. In other words, He is the glue that keeps our atoms from flying apart. He holds all of creation in His capable hands. **The implication here is two-fold: on the one hand there is nothing outside His control – His hands hold it all; and secondly, our very existence is dependent upon His mercy and grace.** If Christ were to open His hands and let it all go – the universe would wink out of existence. As men delve further and further into the secrets of the universe and the complexity of the human body – the evidence continually shows how Christ is the center of it all.

Recently, I saw a DVD called, How Great is Our God with Chris Tomlin and Louie Giglio, where Giglio is describing how creation itself shouts recognition of our Creator. At one point he introduces us to something called Laminin. Wikipedia defines it like this: "Laminin is the major non-collagenous component of the basal lamina, such as those on which cells of an epithelium sit.

Basically, laminin is a protein found in the "extracellular matrix", the sheets of protein that **form the substrate of all internal organs** also called the "**basement membrane**"....They are a family of glycoproteins that are an **integral part of the structural scaffolding** in almost every animal tissue...Laminin is **vital to making sure overall body structures hold together.** **that is Laminin – it is the glue that holds our bodies together.** So what? So...here is what laminin, that thing that holds things together, looks like:



Don't tell me that's coincidence. Christ holds everything together and the evidence is even found in the unseen parts of creation. Even biology preaches the Gospel, and testifies to the central defining feature in all of Creation: the cross of Jesus Christ! Isn't that amazing? The thing that holds our body together is the very symbol of the Savior who died and rose again for us. What are the chances that out of the nearly infinite number of symbols in the world, something, or rather Someone, out there chose the symbol of the cross to hold our body together. Literally, Jesus holds me together. What more can I ever, ever, ever need?

The more scientists find out about our universe, the more they begin to realize that none of this happened by chance: Dr. Paul Davies, noted author and professor of theoretical physics at Adelaide University: *"The really amazing thing is not that life on Earth is balanced on a knife-edge, but that the entire universe is balanced on a knife-edge, and would be total chaos if any of the natural 'constants' were off even slightly. You see," Davies adds, "even if you dismiss man as a chance happening, the fact remains that the universe seems unreasonably suited to the existence of life -- almost contrived -- you might say a 'put-up job.'"*

Dr. Dennis Scania, the distinguished head of Cambridge University Observatories says: *"If you change a little bit the laws of nature, or you change a little bit the constants of nature -- like the charge on the electron -- then the way the universe develops is so changed, it is very likely that intelligent life would not have been able to develop."*

Dr. David D. Deutsch, Institute of Mathematics, Oxford University: "If we nudge one of these constants just a few percent in one direction, stars burn out within a million years of their formation, and there is no time for evolution. If we nudge it a few percent in the other direction, then no elements heavier than helium form. No carbon, no life. Not even any chemistry. No complexity at all."

The August '97 issue of "Science" (the most prestigious peer-reviewed scientific journal in the United States) featured an article entitled **"Science and God: A Warming Trend?"** Here is an excerpt: *"The fact that the universe exhibits many features that foster organic life -- such as precisely those physical constants that result in planets and long-lived stars -- also has led some scientists to speculate that some divine influence may be present."*

Just think, if Christ holds the universe together – what are the chances that He can hold your out-of-control life together? If He can keep stars from colliding together in galaxies containing millions of them – what are the chances that He can make order out of your life? If He is in control of the very constants that keep us alive – what are the chances that He knows what you need and when you need it? If Christ spoke the worlds into existence with a word what are the chances that He can speak peace into your soul?

If the mind of Christ conceived this universe with all of its stunning levels of complexity, and knife-edge balance, what are the chances that He has the wisdom and knowledge you need for every circumstance and situation you will ever face? **He holds everything together!**

Our gracious God and Father,

Grant that we would see and savor the beauty of Christ in all of life. May nothing in our lives be disconnected from the truth that everything exists to display the glory of Your Son. Enlarge our appetites to know You more – more deeply, more fully, more completely. As heaven is full of the glory of Christ may our hearts be full of You. May we never move away from the truth of the gospel that bring us to Christ and sustains our faith. Grant that we would know Christ as the sum of everything and in Him is all we need. Lord, reveal Yourself as power to expel every rebel lust and reign supreme. Reveal Yourself as teacher, leading us into all truth; as love that we may love You and one another. Come as joy to live in us and fill our souls to delight in You. Come as Helper with strength for every day and hope for tomorrow. Make our lives a living testimony of Your great power and grace and cause us to be glad in You and to live to make the nations glad in You, we pray in the precious and powerful name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto You.
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.***