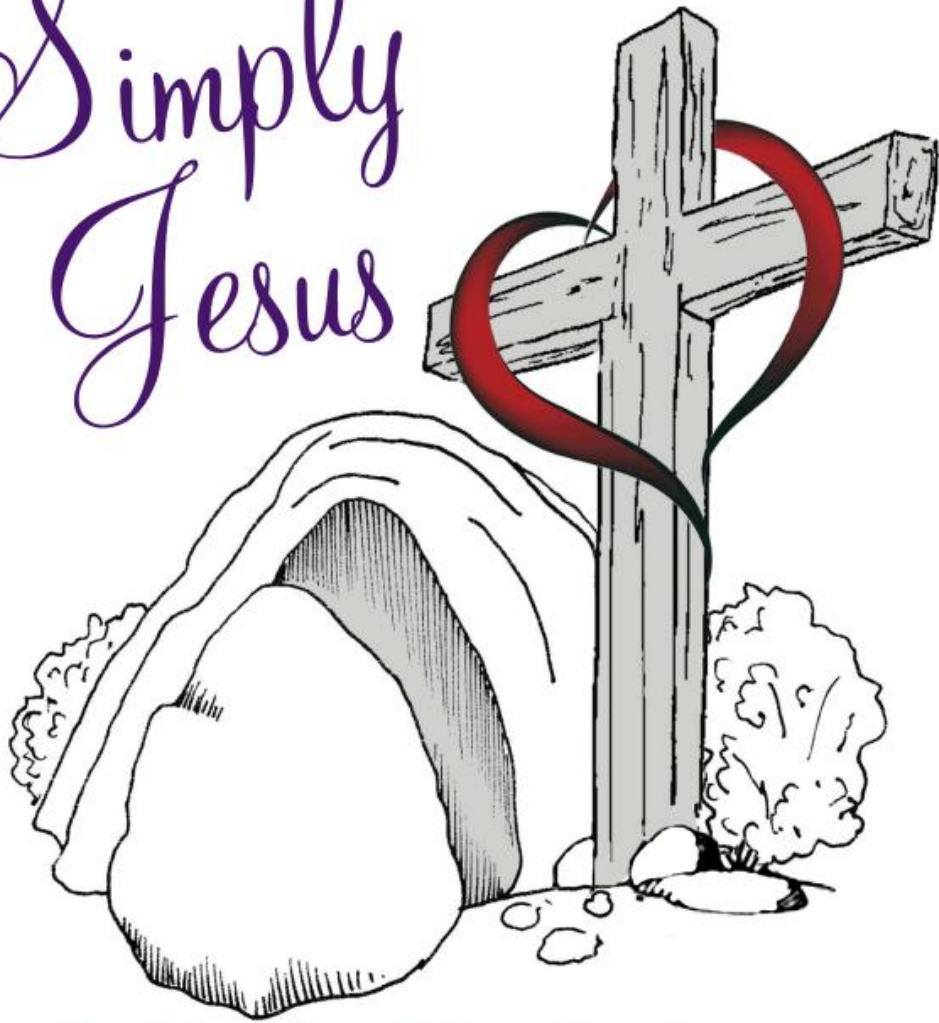

Simply
Jesus



But Not a Simple Jesus

Paul R. McCuiston

Teaching **4** Jesus
MINISTRIES

Image of God



Jesus will come
to have first place
in everything

Colossians 1:18



Chapter 4

The Image of God Colossians 1:9-20

Mark tells the story of Satan using Peter to block Jesus' mission. You see, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem even though he knew he would die. He intended to die. He had to die to complete God's plan (His will. Or to use Bible language, covenant). Peter has been with Jesus for three years. They are very close. Peter stands in front of Jesus, stopping him from going to Jerusalem. You probably recall what Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan! (Mark 8:33). Get this picture in your mind. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to do what God wants. Peter tries to block him.



This pictures a change between this account and when Jesus first called Peter. When they first met Jesus said, "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19). What you need to see in this is the relationship of Peter to Jesus. In the beginning, he is behind Jesus, following. Now, as Jesus' faces death, Peter jumps in front as if to say, "I know what's best." In other words, Peter is saying, "Let me lead, Jesus." This great reversal describes the Christian who is trying to make up the rules. Like Adam, they are saying "I don't need God. I know what's best for me. After all, this is a different time than when the Bible was written."

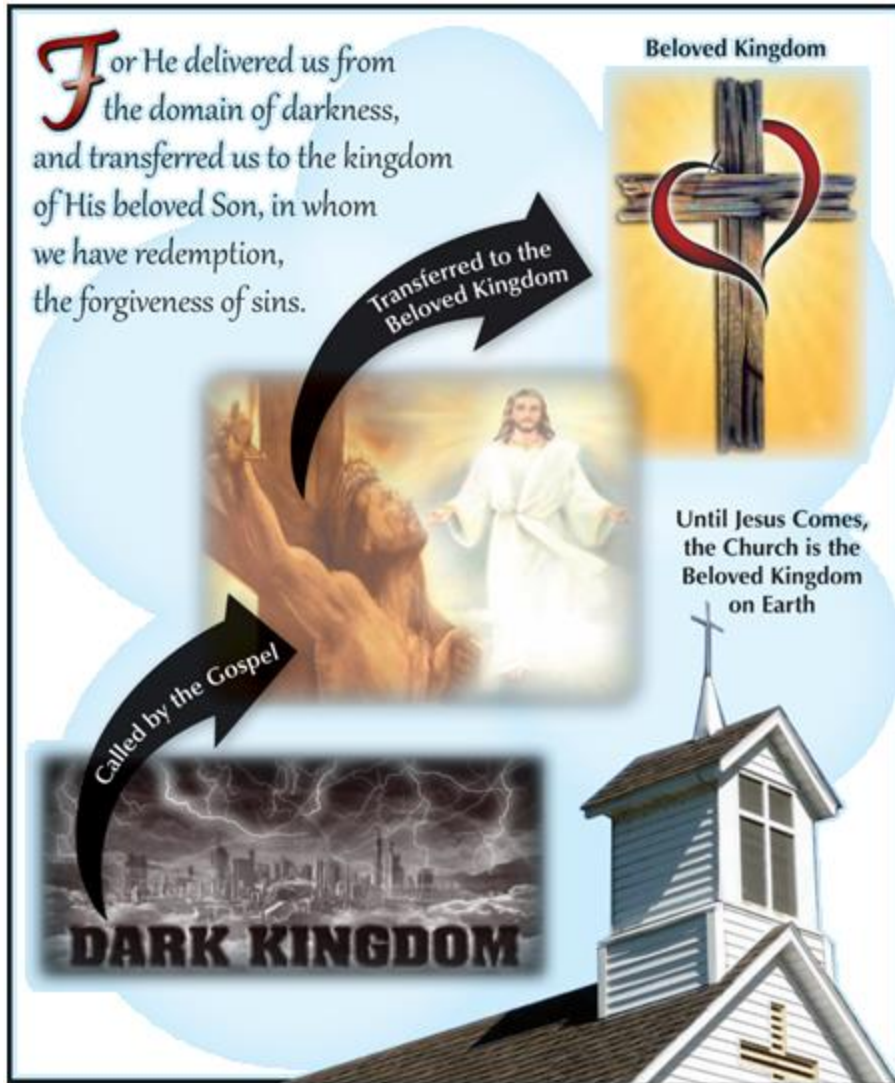
This line of thinking prompts the question, "Who's leading?" For Paul, the key is to know the will of God. Why? The answer is simple. God's will is for us to "bear fruit" (Colossians 1:10). What this means is that we learn to live like Christ and it is as natural as it is for an apple tree to grow apples. When this happens, it will affect "every good work" (Colossians 1:10). Something else occurs. We are "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). See the pattern? Let's examine the process of how to overcome ourselves to serve our Lord in this way.



Simply Jesus

Transferred

Paul paints an impressive picture in verses 12-14. Here is a visual to help explain it:



Any questions? I think this makes Paul’s concept pretty clear. Creation was cursed. With God no longer “walking in the cool of the day,” it became a dark, fearful place. Genesis 6 portrays this as “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). Picture the world without the love and light of God. If you can, you’ve got a good idea of what the writer meant. Paul paints another dismal picture of this world when he describes us as “separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15). This gift was Jesus! He invited us out of this world. The invitation was written in blood. Paul said it best, “He called you through our gospel” (2 Thessalonians 2:14). What is the gospel? We know it as good news. Here is how Paul described it, “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He

Image of God

was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15: 3-4). Paul will tell the Romans that our baptism connects us to the death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-5). Baptism points us to the Gospel and helps us participate in the Gospel.

Now, the transfer is complete. We are in the Kingdom of the Beloved. His kingdom finds expression in the church where we are “serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). The problem is that too many say they believe and walk away, never to serve Jesus again. They just want to be saved but not to serve. Are they not aware that he came to serve, not be served (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). Why do they not recognize and accept the real king of this world? In fact, they seem to know little of this great King of Glory. Who is he? What is his true nature? Paul moves without delay into this great hymn of praise regarding Jesus. This hymn tells us his nature and his right to serve as our king.

The Image of God (15-18a)

The idea of God having an image makes us think of idols. This idea is the problem that some have with this phrase. We saw earlier how God set his image in the Garden in Adam. His created son was to rule and all creation was to honor him. However, his image bearer reversed the order. Instead of being its ruler, he was now ruled by creation. As we know, his nature was now controlled by a body that will die. To reverse this great injustice, God once again set in motion a way to bring creation back to its “good” order. *Re-creation* will be through the adoption of the sons, which Paul states will happen with the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23). Before this could happen, the Invisible had to become visible.

Invisible God

We expect gods to be invisible, don't we? Or do we? God's have always visited the earth. In any myth, legend or Bible story, gods make appearances. Why, because we don't like what we can't see. Let me share a story that brings this home to me. As a child, I would walk from our house over to my friends. There was a field between our houses. One day as I was crossing the field, I heard someone walking behind me. I turned around, but no one was there. Odd. I was sure I heard someone. I kept walking, not hearing anything again. This happened two or three more times. Finally, one day as I was crossing the field, I turned around and saw the source of the sound. Behind me, in the grass, as clearly as I see now, there were fresh footprints being made. I watched as an invisible foot made an impression in the grass. There were several steps before they stopped. Sounds like a ghost story? Not to me. I smiled as I turned around to finish my journey, knowing that my guardian angel was with me.

My faith has been strong from my youth. It was no ghost or illusion. I was confident that God was telling me that his guardian angel was there to protect me (Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:14). I think many hope to *see* God one day. Some say they see him in others. The desire to *see* God is, I believe, natural. For me, this raises the question of how can God be known?

Two familiar pictures that are associated with Jesus as God are as the wisdom of God and the *Logos*. Paul deals with the first in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, where he sees the wisdom of God in Jesus' crucifixion. It causes the Jews to stumble. To think that their messiah had to be put on a Roman cross was disgraceful. Gentiles (anyone who is not a Jew) think God is foolish. How does a man dying as a criminal give any hope or peace? That's disgraceful as well.

This question brings us to the main point that I would like to propose. I will provide a “proposition” or “proposal” statement for each of the four lessons on the key Christological passages. Please note that each of these will include a word that signifies an obligation to the reader. Typically, I use the word **must**. I do this to place a sense of duty or responsibility on you. I never want anyone to say “So what” about these ideas. My goal is that each of these lesson proposals will motivate the reader to greater service by understanding who Jesus is, what he has done, and what that should mean to us. The only way this happens is if we become actively involved in the learning process and application of what is learned. For this reason, I try to create a compelling proposal and support it with convincing and logical reasons. I will state these clearly so that you will know them. You might consider these as lesson objectives. In this, you will have both the motivation and reasons for a more determined service to our King. After all, Christianity is about serving, not being served.

Proposal

TO SERVE EFFECTIVELY IN HIS KINGDOM, WE MUST KNOW HIS NATURE THAT GIVES HIM THE RIGHT TO SIT ON THE THRONE! In our Colossians' passage, Paul gives us two pictures of the image of God in Jesus that gives him this right.

- I. Jesus is the Image Of God (15-17)
- II. Jesus is the Fullness of God (18b-22)

We need to study these ideas to see how we can use them to build our faith in King Jesus and his right to sit on the throne.

He is the image Of God (15-17)

As stated, this brings to mind the pictures of idols. Not so with Jesus. Think back to Genesis and the creation of Adam. He was made in God's image. While we don't know what that is, we do know that humanity and God share something called "image." To help the Colossians understand this, Paul uses concepts and terms that deal with the physical world and their own humanity. He starts with the physical world.

Firstborn of all creation (1:15)

Jesus is called the firstborn of all creation. Various people at different times have said, "See, I told you Jesus was created." They think *firstborn* means created. Not the way Paul or the people of his time understood this term. Think of *firstborn* as more of a title or description of importance or position. The Middle Eastern culture held the firstborn in high esteem, especially if it was a male.

Paul will show this as a title of honor by stating first that Jesus was the creator of all things. Hold on. I thought God created everything. Remember Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God ..." Jesus wasn't even born yet. Ding, Ding, Ding! The bells should be going off in your head about now. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that Paul is saying that Jesus is God! His is the perfect image of God. I'll say more on image in a minute. Paul makes two arguments to defend this statement. The first happens when he says that Jesus was *before all things*. Jesus made a similar statement that almost got him stoned, He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). This got him in trouble because he said he was the "I am." This was the name of God. He was blaspheming. This is why they wanted to stone him. He hid because it wasn't time for him to die and stoning was not the way he would die.

Creation is always the hallmark of a god. Only gods create something out of nothing. While Genesis doesn't say this, it is implied. The writer of Hebrews tells us, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3). "Prepared" here means to put things in order. Genesis 1 paints this picture of God giving order to chaos. In Colossians, Paul uses a term for creation that summarizes the Hebrews passage. This word means to create out of nothing. It is this role of the creator that leads to the next argument.

The next argument states that in Jesus, *all things hold together*. Only gods who create can do this. Hebrews 1:3 informs us that he does this *by the word of his power*. The better translation

would be the *message* of his power. The writer doesn't use *logos*, which is the most common word. Instead, he uses a word that means *collection or group of words that provide a meaning; a message*. Hum! I wonder what he says to *hold things together*. For me, there is only one message that makes sense. It has to be the Gospel since that is the message that will redeem our bodies and free creation from the curse (Romans 8:22-23). From here, Paul moves to another physical identity – the church.

Head of the body, the church (18a)

Three times Paul will state this. In addition to this one, he uses the same idea in Ephesians 1:22 and 5:33. Later in this chapter, he is going to make the church personal by saying that it is *his* body (1:24). We believe that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father (Matthew 26:24; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33; Romans 8:34). If he is there, how is he here? He is present both in and as the church. This is wrapped up in Paul's concept of being *in Christ*. Paul uses some form of this ("in him," "in Jesus," "In Christ," or some form with Jesus and Christ) one hundred and seventy-four times. I guess this is pretty important to him, wouldn't you say? Because of our transfer into his kingdom, he has a physical presence in this world. You and I are that presence. We are the person of Christ to others. As the song says, "You're the only Jesus some will ever know." It is so important that we know the story of Jesus. We *must* be able to tell his story. This is why we practice telling it. This is why we spend so much time talking about the gospel. We want you to know and say it.

In order to support this idea, he uses a similar statement as in his Image statement. Another *firstborn* is given. This supports the idea of an important position or relationship to the father. This time, Paul attacks the very issue of Genesis 3. He attacks the penalty of death that humanity has been carrying. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. He is not the first to be resurrected. There are three in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:35; 13:21). Jesus himself raised people from the dead (Widow of Nain's son, Luke 7:13-15), Jairus' daughter, Matthew 9:25, and Lazarus, John 11: 43-44). For that reason, it certainly can't mean he was the first one to live after being dead. No, he holds a special place because he defeated death. Hebrews tells us that death is our worst enemy. It encourages us to be body led. Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die.

With these two *real world* images, Paul has brought the image of Jesus into our world, helping us to understand his nature. While these may be understandable, it still raises the question of Jesus' divine nature. Even with these explanations, we need to dig deeper into the concept to understand Jesus' divine nature. This is especially true if we are to consider how the nature of God and humanity can exist together. Here is a simple illustration that may help.

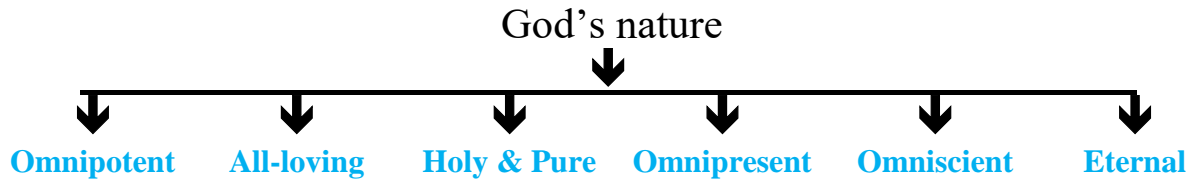
Play-Doh!

This great hymn of faith tells us much about the person and nature of Jesus. His relation to God is obvious. He is God with us, Emmanuel. He holds the very nature of God as creator and sustainer of our world. Since we are very *self-centered* about our salvation (admit it, when it comes to salvation, we are), the idea of Jesus as firstborn from the dead is probably the most attractive feature about Jesus. We want to conquer death. We like the idea of being free from its grasp. What we need to remember is why we are set free. We are free to be servants. In fact, Paul actually uses the concept of being a slave. This doesn't sound appealing. Yet, that's why this

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hymn was written. Still, there is more that we need to know. You see, this great hymn about Jesus does **not** answer the basic question of *how*. How is a human the image a God? How can a God be limited to a human body? Then, there's the question of human nature. How does a God deal with that? Let's work on this. I think this will help us understand why God wants Jesus to have the preeminence. We will understand why Jesus can say, "Before Abraham was born, I AM! (John 8:58).

Remember when I raised the question of how a god should be known? We drew some conclusion about God's nature. Do you remember? Let's see how this applies to Jesus. First, let's review what we said about God's nature.



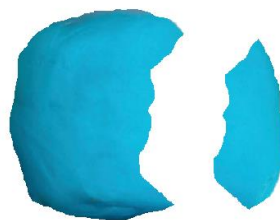
These terms are very meaningful and tell us much about God's nature. In the introduction, we used the term *essence* as a synonym for the words characteristics and nature. This means that the words we are calling his *nature* can also be called his *essence*. Now, concluding that Jesus has the same nature as God, we would insist that these describe Him as well. That is, Jesus shares the same *essence* as God. Hope this is not clear as mud! What I'm trying to say is that God and Jesus share these same qualities. Let me use Play-Doh to show you how this happens.

Let's say that the qualities listed above (God's essence) are represented by the blue Play-Doh in the diagram below. So, we are saying that if we take all of these, roll them up a ball, they might be like this blue ball of Play-Doh. Now, we are going to take a piece of God's essence. We have two pieces but they are both the same God. We have the essence of God in both pieces. Each one has the exact same qualities as the other. They are from the same *God*. They are the same God. So, God's Spirit, which has the same qualities, visits Mary and puts this essence into her womb. Mary now has the *seed* of God's nature growing in her. At birth, God now has human form, fully God, fully man.

The essence of God takes human form. God became like us so that we could become like him.



God's essence



Holy Spirit puts essence
in Mary's womb



God's essence
takes human form

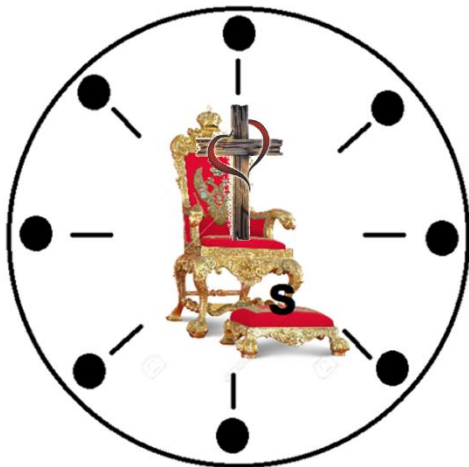
The Fullness of God (18b-22)

This text moves very quickly into the reason for this high praise of Jesus. In English, it is translated with “so that.” The way Paul wrote it, it gives the idea of purpose or fulfillment. He might say, “If you consider the very nature of Jesus as the same as God’s, then it should be only natural that Jesus has first place in our lives!” Are you seeing the pattern here? Jesus is

- ❖ Firstborn of all creation
- ❖ Firstborn from the dead
- ❖ First place in our lives

Any questions? There shouldn’t be. If you believe what Paul has said about Jesus, then his position in our lives should be automatic. Here is a good visual of what this means:

“To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever” (Revelation 5:13)



- 👑 The **Lord Jesus Christ** (†) is on the throne of my life
- † **Self** (**S**) is yielding to the Lord Jesus
- ☑ **● Heart, ● mind ● body**, all of the **points** (●) of my life, are aligned to the will and purpose of Jesus, resulting in a life dedicated to his service

IT'S ABOUT WHO JESUS IS & WHAT HE IS DOING!

Jesus' nature *demands* that he is first place.

Note the qualifier: “in everything!” Paul used a form of “all” like we did as kids when we said, “everybody’s doing it.” There are places where Jesus lets us have control. He doesn’t want us to be robots. Nevertheless, we need to consider that everything we do could have an effect on the way people see Jesus in us. Language, dress, work ethics, etc. should be guided by the teachings of Jesus. The safe position is to consider Jesus with every decision.

More on the *because*

Paul gives us two ideas that should help us put Jesus first. He uses two phrases, *in him* and *through him* to show why Jesus has the right to be first. Let's spend a little time with each phrase.

In him

Paul gives a beautiful picture of God living in Jesus. The idea is of close, family ties. A bond only a devoted father and son can know. Notice that this brought God pleasure. God has many children. His preference is Jesus as Paul has already stated as having the first place. He is partial toward Jesus because he is bringing many sons to know the glory of God (Hebrews 2:10). Jesus is the perfect one to do this because he shares the nature of God. Since God was offended in Eden, it is only proper for Jesus to make a way for us to be friends with God again. Jesus took a body because the animal sacrifices couldn't do what Jesus did (Hebrews 10:5-6). The writer of Hebrews said God was not pleased with the animal sacrifices. He is pleased with Jesus. Why? Simple. Jesus' perfect nature is "full of God!" He is able to be perfect because of his nature.

Through Him

To say it again, God was the one who was offended in Eden. We didn't make the first move to undo that. Instead, we got so wrapped up in ourselves, in our bodies, and what brings them pleasure that we didn't try to make up with God. You've got to see the contrast here. God was pleased to live in Jesus. We were satisfied to live in ourselves.

Since God's nature is to be just, he didn't just *write it off*. He had to do something that would restore creation and treat the sin that entered the world justly. There was only one way to do that. Jesus had to conquer death. After all, it was death that was causing us to be self-centered. If God could do away with the control death has on us, then we would once again want to have fellowship with him. He would be the center of attention again. Since gods don't die, God had to *share* flesh and blood with us (Hebrews 2:14).

Here is how Paul states it, "although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled* you in His fleshly body through death, to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (Colossians 1: 21-22). Here is a simple way to say all of this: "We have offended God by the way we live. He wants to be our friend but can't until he forgives us. It's not fair for him to do that unless someone pays the fine for sinning. Jesus paid that fine since we couldn't pay it ourselves. Jesus wants to set us free from our selfishness so we can be God's friend again. This friendship is good because he needs us to help others become his friend. Don't you want to be his friend?" This message is a 30 second Gospel presentation that anyone can learn and say to others. Will you do it?

With the blood applied, we are "holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (Colossians 1:22). Simply put, we are now clean enough to serve him in his Beloved Kingdom. There is a big **IF**. We are expected to stay friends. Paul meant this when he said, "If you continue" (Colossians 1:23). We are expected to be as faithful to Jesus as Jesus was to God. We are to serve, not need to be served. We are to be involved in kingdom work. We are to be busy telling others that Jesus is the King and he can free us from the dark kingdom.

Wrapping up

Simply Jesus

This lesson opened with the question of who's leading? Is it you or is it Jesus? This is a valid question for Christians. In order to commit to his leadership, we cannot make our lives about us. This is why we proposed that,

THEREFORE, TO SERVE EFFECTIVELY IN HIS KINGDOM, WE MUST KNOW HIS NATURE THAT GIVES HIM THE RIGHT TO SIT ON THE THRONE! In our Colossians' passage, Paul gives us two pictures of the image of God in Jesus that gives him this right.

- I. Jesus is the Image Of God (15-17)
- II. Jesus is the Fullness of God (18b-22)

If we can develop a faith that readily accepts these truths, then we will make our lives about Jesus. This will be reflected in our church attendance, our ministry to the body of Christ, and the moral base we build on. Are you willing to make it about Jesus?

Image of God

NOTES

Simply Jesus

NOTES

Simply Jesus

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the image of Peter's position in relation to Jesus. Put yourself into Peter's shoes. Why would you want to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem? Do you ever get in Jesus' way of doing the will of God? How can we do this?
2. Examine Mark 8:33-38. What does following Jesus involve? If this is following Jesus, would doing the opposite mean that we were like Peter and stopping Jesus' mission? Please explain.
3. Is the idea of transfer the same as being saved? If so, how? If not, what are the differences? What does the image of *kingdom* impress on you? What about Jesus as King, since every kingdom needs a king.
4. Discuss how faith, repentance, baptism, and church participation come into play with the idea of the transfer to the Beloved Kingdom.
5. Does Paul say Jesus is God in this passage? Please explain your position on this?
6. Think about the Play-Doh illustration. Does this help you better understand the idea of the *essence* of God taking human form? Explain how he can be fully God and fully human.
7. What does it mean that "God became like us so that we could become like him?" 2 Peter 1:4 (please read in context) talks about being "partakers of *the* divine nature." What do you think Peter meant? How does this relate to the idea of us becoming like God?
8. Discuss the images Paul uses of Jesus as the *Firstborn*. What about these demands that Jesus have the first place in our lives? Discuss the picture with Jesus on the throne of our hearts.
9. Paul talks about "in" and "through" Jesus. How does the "in" relate to the idea of the transfer to the Beloved Kingdom? How does the "through" apply to the means of transfer?
10. While grace is free, the transfer is into a kingdom where we are expected to serve. Discuss the idea of the *big IF* as it relates to kingdom life (page 55).