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## Christ Over All

### Part 2 – The Head of Our Church

Ted Cunningham and Travis Brawner

**Ted Cunningham:** We, all the way up through November, are going through the Book of Colossians. So, if you have your Bibles, turn to Colossians 1. We're going to be going through Verses 15-29 today. I'm joined by my friend and one of our elders at Woodland Hills, Travis Brawner. Help me welcome Travis Brawner. But we've got to jump right into it. We're praying that prayer from the movie, The Patriot, "Lord, make us fast and accurate," we have 25 minutes.

We're talking today about the supremacy of Christ. It actually goes throughout the whole Book of Colossians. Chapter 1, we get this rich theology and you start to pick Paul's tone up a little bit in Chapter 1 where he's needing to address false teaching that's coming against the church. You really get that in Chapter 2, where we'll pick up next week, where we get strong warning and as is the pattern of Paul's writing, Chapters 1 and 2 deal with theology and in Chapters 3 and 4 we get into the application.

Today, we're going to hit a lot of topics from Colossians, but we're talking about the supremacy of Christ over all. And in these times where we're being tested as a nation, as a family, as a church, there's a lot going on. We have our gatherings being interrupted, we have travel plans interrupted. Many people are dealing with a lot of stress at work, and we have many unemployed among us, wondering what the next step for their lives is going to be. We're dealing with rioting, disrespect for authority, the lawlessness. We're dealing with fires out west. It looks as though another hurricane is headed toward the gulf coast. What do we do in all of these times when we're stripped? That's why we're focusing... We're going to talk about everything we're stripped from. How do we deal with that? Today we are going to see that with the supremacy of Christ.

**Travis Brawner:** I love what you said, Ted, in that when we talk about Christ over all. He laid the foundations of the earth, the foundation of my faith, and the foundation of the church, and that's key in what we are talking about today as Christ over the head of our church. And 2020 has been difficult for so many of us in so many ways, like you said. When I think of 2020, I get this picture in my head. How many of you can relate to this picture in 2020? This is a picture of a house that has been ripped by a storm, a tornado, or a hurricane that has come through. Many of us figuratively feel like this house. This is how we feel because we've been stripped in a lot of ways. Stressed and stripped of so many things.

What are the things we've been stripped of? One of those, the first one I think of is **comfort**, right? We started feeling the pressure of the things that were taking place early on in the year, our comfort of our

routines, of our stability, and so many things. Maybe our job stability, our income stability, regularity of so much around us. So, we were stripped of our comfort.

And then, we became quickly stripped of our **connection** in the face to face time that we have with one another. We have Zoom, and we have Facetime, and we have online, and we have so many things...

**Ted Cunningham:** And I'm tired of all of it.

**Travis Brawner:** We know that.

**Ted Cunningham:** And I'm exhausted by it. Raise your hand if your exhausted by it. No more Zoom... Okay, go ahead. I'm sorry to interrupt.

**Travis Brawner:** Thank you. Stripped of our connection, we have those things, but it's nothing like being there with one another.

Then we get stripped our **control** by so many things that we're told we can do or can't do and we start feeling like we're losing control as it's stripped away from us.

And as these things happen, sometimes we're stripped of our **calm** as a result. I can do this from time to time. This can be me when I'm stripped of my comfort and my control, I start feeling stripped and I start losing my calm. Kari tells me that when I'm stripped of comfort and control, sometimes I resort to the doomsday feeling, like this is the worst thing in the world and it can't get any worse than this. And then she'll remind me it's okay, it's just that your favorite restaurant is closed, and we'll find somewhere else to eat."

**Ted Cunningham:** India Clay Oven will open at some point.

**Travis Brawner:** You know where it is. I'm stripped of my cuisine.

**Ted Cunningham:** OH! Another "C."

**Travis Brawner:** You see what I did there? The problem is that it can lead us to be stripped of our **composure** and this is where it gets serious because when we are stripped of our composure or we lose our composure, we start to misrepresent the One who laid the foundation of our faith, the One who is the foundation of our church. Many of us, because of this feeling of being stripped in our church, we start becoming concerned for the church and concerned about our faith and Christianity, especially in our country as we're watching the news media and things that are taking place and we start to say, "Well, Christians are being persecuted for their faith because of what's going on." I think we have to be really careful about that because when I think of persecution, I think back to the early church, the first Century martyrs, and the things that they suffered in persecution.

A couple of weeks ago, I had lunch with one of our missionaries, Chris, that's home on furlough right now. When I talk to Chris... Of course, sitting there at lunch, we can talk freely with one another, but

where he is I can't even say because of his safety and his family, but when they communicate with text messages and emails, he does it in code because he can't say the word Christ, he can't say the word gospel or mission or things that may cause the local government there to be onto him because he and his family could be kicked out of the country or even worse. So, we have to be careful because when we talk about being persecuted... When I think about sitting in the outdoor venue in an Adirondack chair with a shade over my head, sipping my drip coffee, persecution being asked to be sit six feet apart from one another, I think we have to be careful about what we say we're being persecuted with right now. And when we are concerned about the church and we are concerned about our faith and the things that are taking place, we know that ultimately, big picture, Ted, that the church is safe.

**Ted Cunningham:** Yeah, and I want to remind us of something that Jesus said because I'm hearing pastors and church leaders, in their struggle for power... Remember we don't fight our battles like the world fights battles. You'll hear this kind of tone and even direct message sometimes like *if the right person doesn't get elected, we're going to lose the church. If the right person doesn't get elected, the church will be closed and could be closed permanently.* I'm here to tell you that can't happen, period! No matter who is in office.

Here's what Jesus said in Matthew 16: 18 – ***"I will build my church (say it with me) and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."*** It can't go down. It can't be taken out. And I know there is a lot of emotion and a lot of passion right now with this election and people are fearing the loss of religious liberty. Can I just... This is going to get a little bit heated in here, but that's why we brought the calm one into the message today. I want to make it very clear to every Christian in here and watching. **If we lose all religious liberty, Christ is still over all, period.** I'll just say it another way. **If we lose all religious liberty, the church still stands.** Christ is over the church.

Today, we're going to move from creation to salvation, we're going to move from the foundations of the earth to the foundations of our faith. I need believers in Christ to really understand this as we move into this text because there's this fear that if this certain thing in our nation doesn't happen, then our faith is at stake. Don't lose your theology in this election season. I could even put up here: If they take our guns, the church still stands. Any amens on that one Bass Pro Community Church? No? If they take it all, the church still stands. Why? Because Christ is over the church and he said the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

**Travis Brawner:** You lost them with the guns, I'm sorry. But you were doing good.

**Ted Cunningham:** I know. But I just think it's a good way for ministries to raise money, but it's terrible theology. It's terrible theology to scare Christians into certain behaviors. We need to be reminded of who Jesus is and what he says he will do, and he continues to build the church. I would even say, during times like this, the church is built even more because the church stands and Christ... Just go. I'm way calmer

**Travis Brawner:** Yeah. So, an appropriate next point... **How we respond to being stressed and stripped matters.**

**Ted Cunningham:** I'm way calmer than the 8:30 and too bad you don't have that on tape. You should have seen the 8:30.

**Travis Brawner:** We're working through some things. Because it reveals whom we follow; it reveals who is in charge, right? And when we think about again this picture of this house that has been stripped by a storm, as we consider that we virtually had been stripped in 2020, it exposes the inner workings of us individually and of our church. In this house, we can now see into the closet and into the kitchen and into the bathrooms and we can see the inner workings of this house because of the stripping that has taken place. So, you see it matters because it reveals whom you follow.

Conversely, whom you follow determines how you will respond when stressed and stripped. I believe that trying times, more than developing character, really *reveal* character. That's why we talk a lot about Proverbs 4: 23 – it's the wellspring of life; everything comes from the heart and that's what's in there. And the deeper the trial, the more revealing, right? So, when we look at the next picture, this other house, this foundation is all that's left; it's been completely stripped. There was a stronger storm that completely stripped everything. The bigger the trial, the more deep the Revelation because of that storm that as come along.

Now, having said all of that, we're going to get into the scripture in Colossians in Chapter 1, starting in Verse 15. The first point we are going to get into is this: **He is God and over all creation.** He is God... As we're talking about Christ over all, he (Christ) is God and over all creation. He is God. We worship a triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are co-equal, co-eternal, and co-creators. Therefore he (Christ) is God and he is over all creation.

We are going to pick up in Verse 15 of Chapter 1. ***15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things*** (all things – you've gotten that by now) ***were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;*** (elected officials, appointed officials, you name it, they are all there) ***all things have been created through him and for him.*** As we look at this and I think you know by now there's a big election taking place this year. Not just the presidential election, but state elections, and as we talk about it... The thrones and powers, rulers and authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. It's important for us to understand, as we're looking at all the government changes that may take place or may not take place, that the government has limited power.

The church, as members of God's kingdom, has unlimited power. Now, be careful not to misinterpret that. We don't say that we are the church and we are under the authority of God, therefore, we can do what we want, when we want, and how we want. That's not what I'm saying. As a matter of fact one writer said it well when he said, "When we can obey God and the government, we should." But, we understand that we, as followers of Christ, part of the kingdom of God, sit under the authority of the one true governing authority that is over all of the universe.

***17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*** He is the foundation. When a storm strips everything else away, he is what's left. Ted, when we talk about the universe that he created, we also understand and, therefore, there is a priority that's in the creation.

**Ted Cunningham:** Yeah, and before I get to that point... I made this point at 8:30 and I want to make sure it goes out at the 10:00. The Lord may call you to leading those discussion and conversations as we move into who to elect and when we're electing... Some of you, God has given you that calling and you need to pursue that, but in your pursuits of government and whatever he's called you to in that, don't lose your theology. Christ is over all. He is over creation.

I love that after we move from the beauty of Christ being over creation into Verse 18, we see that he is over the church. And we are going to see the supremacy of Christ, Christ the reconciler, reconciling man to God. The big idea is **Humanity is the priority of creation**. So, we've been given to be stewards of creation – men and women... I know there are a lot of commercials on television that go against this and they are wrong, but we're not on the same level as dogs and cats. Can I get an amen on that one? We are over dogs and cats. And all God's people... that's going to be the primary Tweet of the morning: We are over dogs and cats. Yes, we know that. Humanity is the priority of creation and we pick this up in Verse 18.

**18 And he is the head of the body, the church...** So, we move from creation and we are moving now into salvation. **....he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead...** He was the first to be raised, which means that's now true for us because we read in 1 Corinthians 15 that because he is raised, we will be raised. **...so that in everything he might have the supremacy.** The theme throughout all the Book of Colossians.

**19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness...** Now, we are going to introduce this today. We'll get more into it next week in Chapter 2, but there are two things going on in Verses 19 and 20 and you start to see the context and the tone of Paul going against the false teaching. And in that day, the false teachers were saying that Jesus was part God, part man, but that is not what we believe, that's not what the scripture teaches. He was fully God and fully man and that's why you get this text. **...have all his fullness dwell in him...** God was pleased to have all of his fullness dwell in him. He's making sure the church understands that.

**20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things...** Some people will use Verse 20 to preach or teach universalism. The basic idea behind Universalism is that all men and all women, every human being will eventually be saved in the end, and that is not true and that is not what Paul is saying in Colossians 1. We read the words of Jesus in Matthew. He says, "For those who do not place faith in Jesus..." Those who are not reconciled to God through Jesus, those who haven't placed faith alone in Christ alone, Jesus says eternal punishment awaits them. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul uses the term *eternal destruction*. In Revelation, John said, "The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever." So, Paul is not teaching here that in the end, no matter how you lived upon this earth or what decisions you made upon this earth, you will be spending time in heaven. That's not what this is teaching. It says, **...whether things on earth or things in heaven...** So, it's not things under the earth. **...by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.** Salvation comes by faith alone in Christ alone.

**21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds...** Remember this. If you're not a believer in Christ Jesus, the Bible uses terms like a *child of darkness* or an *enemy of God*. **...because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body...**

So, here's the tone you're going to see from Chapter 1 to next week with Chapter 2. He's telling believers, those who placed faith in Jesus, you have been reconciled. Next week and the two weeks following today, the message is strong warning. You're going to get dumped in a void. You're going to hear that. Don't be led astray, don't fall away from the faith. You have been reconciled by Christ's physical body. And the reason this comes back to us ***through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...***

Here's the word picture we get from what Travis shared and into this. The first time I heard this in seminary, I remember it was Dr. Charles Dyer. He brought these two great word pictures and I want to share them with you, so we understand what Paul is talking about, a theme throughout all of scriptures.

**Creation is the handiwork of God, but salvation required his whole arm.** I love these word pictures that you see how much you matter to God. In Psalm 8... If you are following along, you can underline this. In Psalm 8: 3-4 - ***3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place...*** I think the worship set this morning walked us through this teaching perfectly. When I think about the finger work of God, ***4 ...what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*** When I think about your creation, what is man's place in all of this? What is our priority in all of this?

In Isaiah 53, we get this other great word picture when it's introducing the suffering servant and salvation that comes only through Christ. ***1 Who has believed our message and to whom...*** Now look at this. We've moved from the finger work of God ***...has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*** He has made his arm bear. Please don't hear he is giving you the right to bear arms. That's not what Isaiah 53: 1 is talking about at all. It's speaking of salvation, not our constitution or the Bill of Rights. He's saying if creation is the finger work of God, salvation is required that he roll up his sleeve and use his whole arm. I love that word picture. That's how much you matter to him. That's how much he cares for you. That was the work required for your salvation and for my salvation. This leads us to a response.

**Travis Brawner:** Yeah, and what we see is the full circle then of creation – the fall and salvation, and I love it. We know that from Verse 21 that we just read that you and Paul, speaking to the Colossians, who are followers of Jesus, who once were alienated and hostile in mind. And from that, we understand we all have sinned. We all need this reconciliation that Christ offers. We all need the whole arm of God for our salvation.

So, with that, we acknowledge it and we understand there should be a response to this salvation that is offered and what the Lord has done us for us with his whole arm. So, we look at Colossians 1 – carrying on in Verse 23. With this, we are going to wrap up through the rest of Colossians 1 and what we are going to see are some of the purposes of the church. We talk a lot about the purposes of the church: worship, fellowship, discipleship, evangelism, and ministry and in this, we see there should be a response as followers of Jesus.

Colossians 1 - ***23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.***

**24 Now I rejoice...** you see there is a response. We are to rejoice. *...in what I am suffering for you...* As James says, "Count it pure joy when we face trials of various kinds." *...and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.* The church is the body of Christ. **25 I have become its servant...** We're seeing service here or ministry, serving one another, serving those outside of our church as a response. *...by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope...* Not despair. Hope is a response as well. *...of glory.*

**28 He is the one we proclaim...** Yet another response. We see evangelism here. *...admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.* So, you see there should be a response. One of all of these things: rejoicing, serving, having hope, and proclaiming the name of Jesus.

**Ted Cunningham:** Yeah, and because Christ is over the church, that's why I'm sticking with the church. I know we hear of believers who fall away from the church. We're seeing this. They fall away from the faith. We're starting to see this with leaders. Books I've read from Christian leaders who now not only have left the church, they've said, "I am no longer a believer." "I am no longer a Christian."

This is a time for steadfastness. We're turning a corner. I know I told you when we were talking about illustrations and you're like COVID... I'm done with COVID; completely done. Raise your hand if you are done with it. We're just done with it. But he's a doctor; he can't be. He has a lot of work still left to do with it. But I said we need steadfastness. We honor those in this church that are struggling with mental health issues and we care for you and we know that the mental health issues, emotional issues, physical issues... We know and we care for that, but, follower of Jesus, it is time for some mental toughness. It's time for some physical toughness. It's time for some emotional toughness because I hear it all the time. Don't leave the church because of hypocrites. Christ is over the church; stay with it for that reason. Don't leave because of the hypocrites in the church. Say that again. Stay because Christ is over the church; don't leave because of the hypocrites in the church.

There is one leader who has kind of worn me out over the years. He left his church years ago because he was just tired of the American church. I would hear his tone and be like, "Yeah, but that's not the tone you pick up from the Apostle Paul. The label in your Bible over this section that Travis just shared maybe says, "Paul's labor for the church." "Paul's striving for the church." That's what we want for you. Strive for the church because Christ is over the church. Labor for the church.

Does the church need to be corrected? Yes. Do we need to be disciplined? Yes. Do church leaders need to leave mad? This leader I'm talking about has not only left the church, but now he's leaving the country because he just can't... His tone toward the American church... You don't get that from Paul. His tone was love for the church. It was care for the church. The church needs to change and there are some things that need to be changing in the church, but because I love you, I'm sticking with it and

that's what I want to encourage you to do. Don't give up. Resilience is mental, emotional, physical toughness that perseveres through suffering and conflict. Because Christ is over the church and the church can't go down, don't quit, don't give up; stick to it.

I called Joe after last week's message. He talked about the foundation of our faith and I said, "Joe, have you ever thought about this?" He is iron in my life. I said, "Joe, have you ever thought not only will we stand before the Lord, but we're going to stand next to the Apostles. Have you thought about the Christian that's going to stand before the Lord and go, 'I gave up on the church.' and Paul looks over at him in disbelief? "Yeah, I went there, and nobody said hi to me." I think the apostles are going, "Step it up!" We aren't part of cancel culture. We're not part of the timidity that you are seeing and the easily offended. Christ is over the church and that means we labor and strive for his body because it's the body of Christ.

I'll leave you with this. **He rolled up his sleeves for us, so I am pleading with you to roll up your sleeves for him.** It's not time to quit. It's not time to walk away. It's not time to hear Christians say something that just hurts your fragility. Step up. Labor for the church; don't give up on the church. Don't quit. Don't give up on your faith. Stick with it. If changes need to be made, be a part of the change, don't be a church expert outside of the church. We have plenty of consultants. We have plenty of church experts right now telling church leaders how to do it. We don't need any more of them. We need people rolling up their sleeves for the church, in the church, doing the work of the church. Can I get an amen on that one? Let us strive and labor as Paul did because Christ is over the church.

Father, we ask that as a church... And I have moments in my tone I know, and words maybe didn't come out just right here at the end. I seek forgiveness for that. I have friends who are consultants and experts and have helped us greatly through seasons. I don't want to be diminishing of what you have called them to do. But we need workers in the church. We need people who are busy about the church.

We don't need any more critics. We need workers. We need people passionate about what's going on in the church, rolling up their sleeves. We can do that because you made your arm bear; you rolled up your sleeve. That was the work of salvation. That's what salvation took. And because we are saved and because Christ is over the church, we will continue to strive and labor and work for the body of Christ.

I pray for the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, they've never trusted Jesus as their savior, that today would be the day they confess their sins, ask Jesus to be their Lord and Savior that they would become a new creature in Christ Jesus.

We pray all of this in the good name and the authority of the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.