

# Pre-Eminence

by H.J. Vine

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*Christ is pre-eminent in all things because He is the Creator Son who came in incarnation as Man, and He has settled eternally the sin question for God's glory and our blessing.*

**Scripture:** John 5:23, John 13:3, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 4:9, Philippians 2:9, Colossians 1:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 1 Timothy 3:4, Hebrews 2:10

**Topics:** "Christ Supremacy", "Gods Sovereignty"

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## Description

H.J. Vine preaches on the pre-eminence of Christ in all things, settled by God Himself, highlighting how pride and ambition have historically aimed at pre-eminence, leading to the fall of Satan. The sermon emphasizes that pre-eminence belongs to Jesus Christ universally, encompassing both earth and heavens, and the importance of accepting God's settlement. It delves into the significance of Christ's work on the cross, His rejection by man, and the future exaltation where He will be glorified and honored by all.

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## Transcript

"That in all things He might have the Pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18).

The question of pre-eminence has been settled long since. It has been settled unalterably by the One who could do it with authority and finality--by our blessed God Himself. Pride, restlessness, and ambition have at all times aimed at pre-eminence. Satan, the first of God's creatures to fall, fell first through this (and that without any hope of redemption). He was in the mountain of God's glorious government, and in the Eden in which God's thoughts displayed their beautiful order; but pride, the snare concerning which grave warning is uttered as to those who have to do with the order of God's house today (1 Tim. 3:4-7), was his fault and his fall.

Both political and religious pre-eminence call into play the proud energies of men, who have not accepted in faith God's settlement of the matter. Such efforts will earnestly progress, until a trinity of evil, as foretold in Revelation 13, have their short-lived day upon the earth; when political and religious power will be headed up in two clever men, the beast and the false prophet, energized by Satan. Those who intelligently accept the settlement that God has already made, and have bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ, are sanctified, or set apart, by the truth, from the present workings of "the mystery of lawlessness" which will culminate in the brilliant but diabolical trinity just mentioned (2 Thess. 2:7).

Pre-eminence in all things belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. It has been the pleasure of the Godhead thus to settle the matter. This pre-eminence is universal, embracing not only the earth, but also the heavens. It is true that a stupendous work had first to be undertaken and finished by Him, because of the presence of sin, before He could take up the public pre-eminence; and that this work involved the blood-shedding of Calvary to bring in peace; but we speak rather of the pre-eminence itself, and of the One to whom it unalterably belongs.

It pleased the blessed and ever-glorious Godhead to dwell in Christ, that by Him, through the work done at the cross, all things might be reconciled to that Fullness which dwells in Him; in the Son of the Father's love, who became Man, and who died and rose again.

As to Israel, and man generally, He is still rejected; though at God's right hand He is exalted; and all things are put under Him, according to the divine settlement; but not yet as a public fact. Faith views clearly the present peculiar position; for faith is "the conviction of things not seen," not seen publicly by the natural eye. Those who have faith take their stand with Christ, and shape their present path in loyalty to Him to whom pre-eminence in all things belongs. This is the present test of faith, and where victorious, it will "be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ." Everything will be righted then according to the purpose of God in His Son; though that purpose itself goes deeper than filling the universe with glory; but this is "according to" it.

Pre-eminence (proteuon) is mentioned once only in Scripture, in Colossians 1:18. Christ is "the Head of the assembly; who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that He might have the pre-eminence in all things." The first place is His alone. In this same chapter we read of that which some speak of as the two headships. The headship in creation and the headship in redemption, or more correctly, reconciliation. This is a helpful way of putting it, for "Firstborn" (Prototokos), twice mentioned here, involves headship. In verse 15 Christ is the Firstborn in the creation; and in verse 18 He is the Firstborn in the reconciliation; and this latter in resurrection, as the former in incarnation. The distinction and dignity of this is His, not because He was, as to time, the first to be born, but because of who He is. Had He been the last to be born, the headship in all creation as Firstborn would still be His. Solomon was not the first to be born of David, but He reigned in regal glory as firstborn on the throne. It is a matter of distinction; only, in that of which we speak, it must necessarily be held in perfect righteousness.

At the present time there is much in connection with "the mystery of lawlessness" which seriously disputes Christ's pre-eminence. It is greatly significant that John, in connection with the one allusion to "the assembly" in his Gospel and Epistles, should single out a proud, place-loving ecclesiastic as usurping pre-eminence; and so, unwittingly perhaps, disputing Christ's pre-eminence; and also as casting out of the assembly brethren whom Christ had received. Neither would he receive an apostolic communication nor apostolic witnesses; but spoke against these latter with wicked words. The Holy Spirit describes this Diotrephes with one word--Philoproteuon, meaning, Lover of the pre-eminence, or Lover of the first place. This word also, like the one which tells of the pre-eminence of Christ, is used but this once by the Spirit of Truth. This man, like those of whom he is a type, set his heart upon the place which belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ alone. He stands out as a solemn warning to any, who, whatever may be the ostensible motive, seek a personal control in the assembly. This Diotrephesian work is seen in casting out and not receiving the brethren. In the third letter of John, which speaks of it, the beloved Gaius is told, in contrast, to be characterized by following what is good, and by receiving the brethren. And especially those who go forth for Christ's Name, and "those who would receive" the brethren, are mentioned commendably. In the apostle's day these outcasts were in good company; and like the one who suffered from men of the same

stamp (described in John 9), they cannot be deprived of the joy of worshipping in the blessed presence of the Son of God.

The Father has decreed that all shall honour the Son. His voice from heaven singled Him out as His beloved Son, and told us to hear Him. The Holy Spirit, too, has come to us, as we are told in John 16:14, to glorify our Lord Jesus Christ. A faithful servant of Christ points souls to Him, as one such said, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5). His own, those He is "not ashamed to call brethren," who know His grace and love, show forth His praises, not their own; and as He said, "I am glorified in them." Even when He shines out in supreme splendour in the future radiance of majesty and might, in the kingdom and the dominion, we are told, "HE shall have come to be glorified in His saints, and wondered at in all that have believed" (2 Thess. 1:10). May we therefore have grace to glorify Him more now. There will be no failure then; but may He be exalted in and through us at the present time.

"He shall be great"

It was in incarnation that Christ appeared as "Firstborn" in the creation. The Headship was His when He came into it in that way; and this place was necessarily His, "because by Him were created all things" (Col. 1:16). He Himself, as the Creator Son, is uncreated and eternal; for it is said of Him, as the Son of the Father's love, that "all" that is "created" was created by Him. He could not therefore have been created Himself. He is the One whom Isaiah calls, "Wonderful, the Mighty God, the Father of Eternity." He is the Word who was with God, and who was God, and He it is who became flesh, and came into the creation which He Himself had made, and dwelt among us! He came, full of grace and truth, to redeem and reconcile! Wonder of wonders! Marvel of marvels! Behold Him! A Child born, a Son given! "A little Child with Mary His mother"! "His Name is EMMANUEL, which is, being interpreted, GOD WITH US." Of Bethlehem of Judea, the favoured spot in the creation, at which the incarnation took place, the Spirit of God said seven and a half centuries before, "Out of thee shall He come forth unto ME Who is to be Ruler in Israel: whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity" (Mic. 5:2, N.Tr.). To Mary, the angel Gabriel said, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord shall give Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

His fragrant life amongst men proclaimed the presence of One who was greater than the greatest that earth had ever seen. The Son, incarnate, had come into His creation. The Firstborn of all creation was here. Men did not recognize this, though they often showed that they felt themselves to be in the presence of One who was beyond their comprehension. When He raised the son of the widow of Nain, "fear seized on all, and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has been raised up amongst us; and God has visited His people" (Luke 7:16). The woman at Sychar's well enquired, "Art Thou greater than our father Jacob" (John 4:12)? On another occasion the Jews asked, "Art Thou greater than our father Abraham?" He replied, "Before Abraham was I AM" (John 8:58). When in the garden beyond the brook Cedron, the band of soldiers with their officers, and the betrayer Judas, sought to take Him; He uttered again those words, I AM; and they went away backward and fell to the ground.

His personal greatness was declared by the works that He did. The fish of the sea obeyed His word; water turned to wine at His bidding; demons released their victims at His command; and disease disappeared at His touch; strength, and sight, and speech, and hearing returned when He spake; yea, death and the grave, and even corruption, yielded up their prey at the sound of His voice. And these things He did as He walked in this world in lowly circumstances; when with the humble and the meek He was as One that

served, when He humbled Himself to minister rather than to be ministered to. What divine grace!

A time, however, is drawing near when He will come in "great power and glory." Circumstances of mighty majesty and regal radiance will then surround Him. All will be changed when He thus returns to take up publicly the Headship in every circle--in the religious and political, and in the social too. The "great Prophet" will be the Priest-King over all the earth! He shall be great indeed! He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high! So shall He startle many nations! Kings shall shut their mouths at Him! At the One who was once despised and rejected!

Greater than Jacob; greater than Abraham; He will surpass the highest hopes of those men of ancient faith. He will, nevertheless, be still the same Jesus, although no longer in circumstances of humiliation. He Himself is the same, yesterday, and today, and for ever. Blessed be His Name. When, however, glory is publicly His instead of humiliation; might instead of weakness; majesty instead of dishonour; and universal homage instead of hatred and rejection; He will still use the same powers for the world-wide healing and blessing of men, "the powers of the age to come," which He used before. Then all shall know Him from the least to the greatest, at "the appearing of the glory of OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST," who gave Himself for us, to redeem us to Himself.

"He who with hands uplifted,

Went from the earth below,

Shall come again all gifted,

His blessing to bestow."

"He Humbled Himself"

The personal greatness and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ rejoices the heart of the true believer; and His official greatness and glory is necessarily of deep interest to him, as well as a source of important instruction in the things that truly matter. But when the heart dwells upon the love which brought Him into this world, upon His humiliation, upon His down-stooping even to death, the one who knows that he is redeemed by His precious blood bows down His soul before His Saviour and Lord and is filled with worship and adoration. It is this manifestation of divine love in God's Son that touches the heart.

Equal with the Father, the Son shared in the glory of the Godhead with Him. He it was who came down into this world to be the Servant of the divine pleasure. He emptied Himself, and took the form of a servant; humbling Himself, He did the will of God in unswerving obedience: even to death itself, and that death, the shameful death of the cross. What obedience! What humility! What grace! Shall we not say, What divinity? "Wherefore," we are told, "God has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil. 2:9-10). How could it be otherwise, than that He should be so honoured? He must in all things be pre-eminent.

It was in His unparalleled down-coming that His love was fully told out, and the greater we see and know Him to be, the greater and more wonderful will the love of such an One appear to our hearts. The marvel of it is that HE should have come down into this world to make us His, that HE should have died for us. It is amazing to us, but it also went up as a sweet savour to God, as we read, "Christ loved us, and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5:2). His heart was set upon us; Christ loved the assembly and gave Himself for it (v. 25). How deeply must He love us! His death

proclaims this: "Hereby perceive we love, because He laid down His life for us."

The love of God, too, is commended to us in that death: "God commends His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). What wealth is brought to us by the down-coming of Christ! "Herein as to us has been manifested the love of God, that God has sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son a propitiation for our sins." The power and divinity of God is proclaimed in creation, but the love of God could not be known through it. His love could only be told out in His beloved Son who died for us at Calvary, it is in Him and there that we perceive it. And that love of God is now in Christ Jesus our Lord, ascended to the right hand of God on high (Rom. 8:39); and nothing can separate us from it.

Then there is the love of Jesus for us personally. I never knew a saint who cultivated the sense of this personal love who did not prosper in his soul, but I have seen those who have made much of our affection for Christ get astray both in spirit and conversation. For true prosperity of soul we must be able to say with Paul, "I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given Himself for me (Gal. 2:20, N.Tr.). It is the constant appreciation of His changeless love which produces love in our hearts for Him. The former and not the latter must be pre-eminent. "We love because He first loved us." This appreciation of the love of Jesus for him is specially noticeable in John the Apostle. He often speaks of the disciple whom Jesus loved, not of the disciple that loved Jesus; though that was true. And as if feeling it more intensely when he went to the grave of Jesus, he speaks of himself as the disciple whom Jesus "dearly loved," using a stronger word than usual (John 20:2). The constant cultivation of this in our hearts by the Spirit of God, remembering the glory of the One who so loved us, will result in true prosperity for God's glory.

#### First in all Things

As we said, the important matter of universal pre-eminence has been settled. In perfect righteousness, and in divine wisdom, the first place in all things is Christ's. It has been the Godhead pleasure so to fix permanently the pre-eminent place; and in view of this, "in Him all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:19-20, N.Tr.). And every heart that knows Him says with gladness, He is worthy to be pre-eminent in all things!

He took the very lowest place. In all His solitary perfectness He stooped to the deepest depths. He felt the awfulness of sin and suffering, of sorrow and shame, and of Satan's oppressive power, as none other could. But in His humiliation He glorified God and finished the work He came to do. Now raised to the highest place, He is exalted above all. "But that He ascended, what is it but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same who has also ascended up above all the heavens, that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:9-10, N.Tr.). He who stooped to the deepest depths is now exalted in the highest heights! Again we say, He is worthy! Most meet it is that this should be so.

It is divinely decreed, "That all should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father" (John 5:23). The Holy Spirit adds a very solemn word for the multitude of religionists who do not honour the Son. "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which has sent Him." In the First Epistle of John, a final and awful word is given by God as to those who think they can know Him apart from Christ. "Whoever denies the Son has not the Father either; he who confesses the Son has the Father also" (2:23, N.Tr.). In

the next letter it is said, "Whosoever goes forward and abides not in the doctrine of the Christ has not God. He that abides in the doctrine, he has both the Father and the Son" (v. 9 N.Tr.). As far back as the second Psalm, men are told to "kiss the Son, lest He be angry."

How natural do those precious words of the Holy Spirit sound in the circumcised ears of true believers: "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand." The assembly, which is His body and His brides rejoices in the place of exaltation, in which she knows Him, and where she is united to Him, as "the Head over all things"; and looking on to the day when He shall take up everything publicly in great glory, she delights to think of Him as "the established Heir of all things." Nor will He take up that public place of power and glory apart from His work on the cross, for it was there "He tasted death for everything" (Heb. 2:10, N.Tr.). Indeed, it is on the ground of that death, and because of the blood of the cross, that He will righteously "reconcile all things" to the Godhead fullness that dwells in Him. Moreover, in permanency, vitality, and stability, "all things subsist together by Him"; and in the fullness of times, when He heads up all in heaven and in earth, He will administratively "uphold all things by the word of His own power" (Heb. 1:3). In His divine dignity, as well as in the matter of time, "He is before all things." And the purpose of His present exaltation above all heavens, we are told, is, "that He might fill all things." Only one who knows and understands the warp and woof of everything, from the greatest to the smallest detail, could possess the capability for this. He alone has the intelligence of everything in the universe, and omniscience, and wisdom and power to handle all in divine perfection. "By Him were created all things."

In this is enfolded the divine secret, for it was none less than the Creator who came in incarnation as "Firstborn of all creation"; just as in redemption and reconciliation is unfolded that same secret, for in resurrection He is "First-born from among the dead, that He might have the first place in all things." Yes, it was the Creator Son who came into the creation as Man; who has settled eternally the sin question for God's glory and our blessing. In Him all fullness dwells, and He is pre-eminent in all things. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily; and, miracle of grace! in that same One we are also filled full! (Col. 2:9).

Something of the magnitude and majesty of the place of pre-eminence in which Christ is set according to the pleasure of the Godhead may be grasped, as we ponder these words: "All things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether they be thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities, all things have been created by Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16).

In a nine-fold way, we see in Scripture the universe, the all-things (ta-panta), related to our Lord Jesus Christ as the pre-eminent One.

1. As the Father's gift to Him (John 3:35; 13:3).
2. As the exalted Head over all (Eph. 1:22).
3. As the established Heir of all (Heb. 1:2).
4. As having tasted death for everything (Heb. 2:9).
5. As the Reconciler of all things (Col. 1:20).
6. As the One by whom all vitally subsists (Col. 1:17).
7. As the upholder of all administratively (Heb. 1:3).

8. As the One who is before all things (Col. 1:17).

9. As the One who is to fill all things (Eph. 4:10).

To these most marvellous facts must be added one other, which is explanatory of all the rest; the fact in which, as we have said, was enfolded the divine secret; the fact which, though thus added to the others, must nevertheless necessarily stand alone in its own transcendence and majesty:

He is Creator of all Things

This does not entirely comport with the so-called "Apostles' Creed"; but it is what God Himself tells us in John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1 concerning the Son. When the Godhead said, Let Us make, He it was who became the active Agent in creation, according to the council of the Holy Trinity; just as afterwards He wrought out the wonderful work of redemption according to divine purpose. All things are "by" Him: all things are "for" Him (Col. 1:16). He is both the Creator and the Object of all things created, for the glory and pleasure of the fullness of the Godhead which dwells in Him. And when His whole work is done, and all things are reconciled to the Godhead fullness by Him, through the blood of His cross, then shall that blessed result be reached:

"Joyful all the wide creation

Rests in undisturbed repose,

Blest in Jesu's full salvation,

Sorrow now nor thralldom knows."

As a "figure of Him that was to come," Adam might stand as the head of a race; and as heading up everything in a redeemed nation, Moses and Aaron might be the political and religious centres in Israel; as head of a glorious administration, brought about through the warrior-work of David, Solomon in all his wisdom might rule in Israel; and as the head of gold, Nebuchadnezzar might shine in the kingdom and in the limited dominion bestowed upon him by God: but all these must fail and fade away, giving place to Him who is Head over all permanently. A mighty prophet might stir the people with his words to seek God for a time; but that Prophet alone, who is also the Priest and King, the Son of God, could speak the vital words which should put men eternally right with God.

Alexander the Great might seek world-wide power (as well as divine honours); but it was not his. Nor could Cyrus nor Caesar obtain and maintain it; for it was not theirs! Much less could the meteor-like Napoleon grasp and hold the sceptre of the world; because it was not his! Equally doomed to failure are the frantic and frightful efforts of a recent power, which is outside the prophetic sphere in which it has pleased God to fix the earthly centre of rule. The world empire is not theirs! No; it belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor will things be rectified till He publicly takes world-wide kingdom and dominion. World-wide! did we say? Nay; His sway must be creation-wide! Then shall all the saved be blessed in Him, and every one shall bless God in His holy Name.

We cannot close without one more word as to this pre-eminent One, whose grace led Him to stoop even to the feet of His loved ones, in view of their having part with Him in His glory. I am referring to that memorable scene when He washed the feet of His disciples on the night of His betrayal; when the Son of the Father, "knowing that the Father had given Him all things into His hands," rose from supper, laid aside

His garments, took a towel, girded Himself, and washed the feet of those whom He loved as His own. This gracious and significant act on the part of our blessed Lord, done in the consciousness that all things were His, was in view of their having "part with Him," as He said. Peter would have withstood such grace; but it was necessary for the end in view. He said to the Father, "The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given them." This He would have us enter into now; to have part with Him, before we are actually glorified with Him.

Therefore He, the Son of the Father's love, the pre-eminent One, stooped down to wash their feet! What astonishing grace! Can it be that He loves us so? He, the great and glorious Heir of all things, stoops to the feet of His own, that they may have part with Him! The graciousness of it excels the expression of words. We can but wonder and adore before Him, our blessed Lord.

Listen! He speaks! He knows our danger. He loves us. What does He say?

"WASH ONE ANOTHER'S FEET." "I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE."

"THE SERVANT IS NOT GREATER THAN HIS LORD."

"LOVE ONE ANOTHER, AS I HAVE LOVED YOU."

Yes; as He loved John; as He loved earnest and true-hearted Peter, who was about to deny Him, under Satan's sifting, with cursing and swearing; as He loved all His own; in view of their having part with Him; thus are we to love one another. It is this which will bear the most eloquent witness to the world, as He said: "By this shall all men know that ye are disciples of Mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves."

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