

# **The Cosmic Christ: An Exegesis of Colossians 1:13-20 and Its Implications for the Twenty-First Century Church**

**Ebenezer Fai**

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## **General Introduction**

The Colossians had become challenged in their faith as they were tempted to juxtapose Christ with the demonic elements in their environs. Because the Colossians wanted to attain the fullness of God, false teachers came and introduced them to a mystic knowledge of God. The tenets were voluntary ascetic practices and the worship of angels who may have been reputed as intermediaries between God and man.<sup>1</sup> This Epistle and particularly from 1:3-20, discusses the Cosmic Christ as Paul speaks of Christ in exalted terms for, he is not only the Lord of the Church but also the ruler of the universe (15-17).<sup>2</sup> This exegetical paper provides a brief synopsis of the deity of Christ, the critical Introduction of Colossians, textual criticism, a verse-by-verse explanation, and the implications for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church. The historical-critical method is used in this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 321.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 363.

## The Cosmic Christ

This section argues that the cosmic Christ is deity as presented to the Colossians by Apostle Paul. The concept of the Cosmic Christ has to do with the Universal or limitless Christ. The teachings of an Alexandrian presbyter Arius became a significant threat to Jesus' divinity in the early Church. Arius argued that only God is eternal and uncreated. The Word, therefore, is merely a created being just that it is the first and highest of the beings; he is not self-existent. The Word is only similar (homoiousios) to the Father and not the same essence as the Father. (homoousios).<sup>3</sup> Despite this, the belief in Christ's preexistence was widely held in the second century.<sup>4</sup> The Arian Christ was a creature of a world of God who had been promoted to the rank of a divine son and redeemer.<sup>5</sup> On the deity of Christ, Peter Lewis posits that in his divine nature, God the Son filled all things and was in all places at the same time.<sup>6</sup> Paul uses two words when he describes the position that Jesus enjoyed with the Father in the past. Morphe talks of internal fitness because Christ possessed inwardly and displayed the very nature of God himself outwardly.<sup>7</sup> He also uses isos meaning equal, to say Jesus is God's equal.<sup>8</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop notes that one of the pointers to the deity of Jesus Christ is that he does things that only God could do. He existed before creation and

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<sup>3</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, ed., L. Arnold Hustard ( Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 213.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology : Systematic, Biblical, Systematic, Apologetic and Practical, Three Volumes in One* ( Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 260.

<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ* ( London: Holder and Stoughton, 1992), 122.

<sup>7</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive Theology* ( Leicester, England, 1986), 269.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

was its creator ( John 1:1-2, Rom 9:5).<sup>9</sup> D. A. Carson corroborating Jesus' deity posits that the name Jesus is the Greek rendering of Joshua meaning "Yahweh saves" and this is connected to the Word of God 'I AM WHO I AM.'<sup>10</sup> In Colossians 1:13-20, Paul endorses the deity of Christ by arguing for his preeminence and supremacy to the elements of this world.<sup>11</sup> Hence, it is safe to conclude that Jesus is universal and limitless because He is deity.

### **Critical Introduction**

The City and Church of Colossae: It was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus and had Laodicea and Hierapolis as its neighbors. A populous and thriving center and well known for its production of wool.<sup>12</sup> The Church was predominantly Gentile, and Gundry notes that phrases like "...once estranged and hostile in mind" could not describe Jewish Christians but Gentile Christians.<sup>13</sup>

**Authorship:** Not all scholars agree that Paul wrote Colossians. Some think that it was a disciple of Paul, while some think he dictated and an amanuensis wrote the letter.<sup>14</sup> They negate Paul's authorship because the heresy combatted in the Epistle is a second-century heresy and Paul was a first-century man.<sup>15</sup> Some scholars argue that the Paul referred to as the author, is not the historical Paul but the

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<sup>9</sup>Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Bukuru, Plateau State: Hippobooks, 2012), 81.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. Carson, *The God Who is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* ( Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2010), 108.

<sup>11</sup> Walter M. Dunnnett, *Exploring the New Testament* ( Wheaton, Illinois: Oasis International Ltd, 2001), 62.

<sup>12</sup> Danny McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction* ( Bukuru, Plateau State: Africa Christian Text Books, 2014), 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan : Zondervan, 2003), 603.

<sup>14</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* ( Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>15</sup> William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan : Baker Book House, 1964), 20-31.

canonical or textual image of Paul was projected in the letter.<sup>16</sup> However, more convincing is the internal evidence in Colossians 1:1, where the author identifies himself as Paul. This researcher on the fact that the language of Colossians is like the one in Paul's other books and because tradition supports his authorship avers that Paul is the author of Colossians. Jerry Falwell opines that since the author claims to be Paul (1:1, 23; 4:8), there is no evidence of anyone else who could have used Paul's name to palm off this powerful polemic.<sup>17</sup> Concurring to this opinion and because the internal evidence supports Pauline authorship, the researcher in this paper opines that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians.

### **Date of Writing**

Raymond E. Brown posits that because the theology of Colossians seems developed and parallels have been detected between Colossians and Romans, 61-63 A.D. are favored by most proponents.<sup>18</sup> The Epistle does not indicate when it was written, and much of the speculation would depend on the place of Writing. Samuel Olugbenga Akintola situates it about early A.D. 60.<sup>19</sup> The researcher because majority of scholars situate it between A.D. 61-63 situates the date of writing in this paper any time between A.D. 61-63.

### **The Origin of the Church**

Donald Guthrie posits regarding the origin of the Church that Epaphras probably was converted to Christianity through Paul's ministry in Ephesus, and Paul himself had not met the

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<sup>16</sup> Carl R. Holliday, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and the Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 395-396.

<sup>17</sup> Jerry Falwell, *Liberty Bible Commentary* (Lynchburg, Virginia: The Old - Time Gospel Hour, 1982), 587.

<sup>18</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Broadway, New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1997), 615.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Olugbenga Akintola, *Understanding Vital Issues in the New Testament* (Ibadan: Arthfavours Global ventures, 2016), 180.

people of Colossae personally. That is why he would say, "...you learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant...."<sup>20</sup> This makes it clear that it was Epaphras who founded the Church and not Paul. N. T. Wright concurs for the founding of Epaphras as he posits that the letter indicates that Paul, who seems to have paid attention to important centers of the population, had not visited the town himself; the Christian community there owed its origin under God to his fellow-worker Epaphras who had brought the good news of Christ from Paul to Colossae.<sup>21</sup> H.M Carson adds that the record of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts does not mention any details of Paul being in Colossae to found a church.<sup>22</sup> The researcher, because of the foregone arguments, opines that Epaphras was the founder of the Church.

Locale of Writing and Audience: Colossians is one of the Prison Epistles written from Rome while Paul was imprisoned (Acts 28:30). Believers in Colossae, as seen in Colossians 1:2 are the audience. Raymond Brown opines that the letter was written to Christians at Colossae in the Lycus River valley in Phrygia in the province of Asia, not evangelized by Paul but by Epaphras. They informed Paul about the problems in the Church.<sup>23</sup> Thus he must have written to address them.

The occasion for Writing: Colossae was in Phrygia, a region renowned in the ancient world for its fascination with all magical and mysterious things. A cult had come from Phrygia called the mother god Cybele and an enthusiastic version of

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<sup>20</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990), 564.

<sup>21</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity, 1999), 22.

<sup>22</sup> H.M. Carson, *The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 600.

Christianity known as Montanism.<sup>24</sup> They believed in divorce, imposed rigid fasts, and were ascetic. It was easy that people from that background would be in vulnerable positions as they were making comparisons with other cults.<sup>25</sup> Paul received the Word of false teachings in Colossae from Epaphras (1: 4-12) and therefore wrote to warn believers of the heresy, a judo-gnostic heresy. Jewish elements insisted on abstinence from certain foods and following certain rituals, while pagan elements emphasized self-denial and worship of angels, and this was an early form of Gnosticism.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Remote and Immediate Context of Colossians 1:13-20**

The remote context begins from Colossians 1:1, where Paul introduces himself and begins to offer thanksgiving while telling them how he remembers them in his prayers. While the immediate context of this pericope starts from verse 12 of Chapter 1, Paul introduces and begins to enumerate the things the cosmic Christ has done for the Colossians, thereby giving them enough reasons to acknowledge Him.<sup>27</sup>

Greek Text: Colossians 1:13-20

The text has been lifted and copied from the Bible Works software with the BGT text used.<sup>28</sup>

ὃς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκοτοῦς καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ,

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<sup>24</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 394.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 394.

<sup>26</sup> Grant Osborne and Philip Comfort, Eds. *Life Application Bible Commentary: Philippians, Colossians and Philemon* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 1995), 136.

<sup>27</sup> Col 1:1-20 (New International Version).

<sup>28</sup>Bible Works 9.

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν  
 ἁμαρτιῶν·  
 ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος  
 πάσης κτίσεως,  
 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ  
 ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε  
 κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα δι'  
 αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται·  
 καὶ αὐτὸς ἐστὶν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ  
 συνέστηκεν,  
 καὶ αὐτὸς ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς  
 ἐκκλησίας· ὃς ἐστὶν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν  
 νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,  
 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι  
 καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν,  
 εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ,  
 [δι' αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς  
 οὐρανοῖς.

See Appendix for Rough Translation.

### Smooth Translation

Verse 13: who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love. Verse 14: In whom we have the redemption and remission of sins. Verse 15: because of Him, all things were created, whether in the heavens or the earth, visible and invisible, thrones or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. Verse 16: and He is before all things, and in Him, all things consist. Verse 17: he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Verse 18: and He is the head of the Body, the Church. And he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead so that he (might) have the first place in everything. Verse 19: it pleased (the Father) that in Him (should) dwell all the fullness. Verse 20: Through Him to

reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through his blood on the cross, whether in the heavens or on earth.

### Phrasal/ Verse by Verse Exegesis

Verse 13 a) who delivered us out of the authority of darkness

Before these Colossians became Christians, they were in the cage of Satan and imprisoned there because of sin. Without a divine deliverance, there was no escape.<sup>29</sup> Paul points to these Colossian brethren faced with Montanism and puts Christ on a par with the cults they knew before accepting Christ as their personal Lord. He lets them know it is not those elements that delivered them but the cosmic Christ. They are in darkness who had caged the Colossians, but Jesus is supreme and superior because he is the One who brought them out of the authority of darkness. It is very instructive to note that Paul is not asking them to seek deliverance but announcing that the Christ he is talking about is the One who delivered them. The Christian Community prays and asks for deliverance, but the question of who will deliver us is already answered in this verse.<sup>30</sup> The Word "delivered" is ἐρρύσατο, a verb in the indicative aorist middle 3rd person singular from ρύομαι meaning 'to rescue,' 'to deliver' hence "he delivered." They are not still seeking deliverance but are already delivered. The cosmic Christ is not still struggling to do that or putting up a front against the elements of the dark but has already delivered them. If they are already delivered, they ought to act accordingly and not still behave as if the Lord will still do it. Jesus is the One who has delivered the believer from the authority of darkness. It is a present hour reality, and because He did this, the allegiance of the Colossians should therefore belong to Christ and not to persuasive peddlers of religious

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<sup>29</sup> R. C. Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon, Fullness and Freedom* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1980), 43.

<sup>30</sup> Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, trans., William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 37.



speculation.<sup>31</sup> Jesus has delivered them from the ἐξουσίας of the darkness. The Word also means the power to act; hence Jesus already delivered them from the power to act of darkness and from the power of demons. Their power to act against them has been nullified, as it were.

b) and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love.

Being delivered from the darkness is terrific but being transferred to or brought into the kingdom is extraordinary.<sup>32</sup> Richard R. Melick concurs with this and posits that the ultimate state for the believer is the Kingdom of God.<sup>33</sup> This is because this is all that matters; entering the kingdom of God. The beautiful thing is that He has not just delivered them but has moved them to somewhere better. He delivered them out of the zone of the devil and has not left them at a crossroad but took them out to take them in. Paul uses the Word μετέστησεν a verb in the indicative aorist active 3rd person singular meaning 'to remove,' to turn away' hence 'He removed' or "transferred.' It is the aorist, meaning he already did it. The third-person points that it is not the Colossians who have worked hard for that transfer. It is the prerogative of the Lord, and he already did it. He does not like seeing his children being in the camp of the enemy. He has taken them to the place where He is in charge, as it were. He transferred them to his kingdom. The Word for domain is βασιλείαν which is a noun in the accusative feminine singular. This means He does not have kingdoms but a kingdom that he moved the Colossian believers into. The kingdom is essentially a political

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<sup>31</sup> Walter A. Elwel and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 319.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Gorday, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IX, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Downers Grove: Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Richard R. Melick, Jr., *The New American Commentary, Vol. 32* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1991), 207.

notion but metaphorically used in this text as a nation and territory ruled over by a divine king.<sup>34</sup>

But then Paul brings in another dimension of the Kingdom of God here; it is not just the One that the believers will go to after they leave this world, but the revelation Paul brings here is that the believer has already been transferred into it thus the Kingdom of God cannot be restricted to the future alone.<sup>35</sup> Jesus' kingship is unique because it is the new covenant confirmation of David's old covenant promise held in the pledge. That kingdom is grounded in eternity in an essential relationship with God whose likeness or icon is the Son.<sup>36</sup> The Son makes that kingdom experience real to the believer.

Verse 14: In whom we have the redemption and remission of sins

Eduard Lohse notes that this relative clause "in whom we have..." speaks of the new Life we received in Christ.<sup>37</sup> This Jesus Paul is describing to the Colossians is the One redemption is in. According to Paul's understanding, that redemption is not something the Colossians and, by extension, the Christians today are still begging God who will one day see our tears or the penance we do to ourselves and then decide to forgive. He has given them that redemption already in Christ. Paul uses the Word ἀπολύτρωσιν a noun in the accusative form ἀπολύτρωσις, and it either means 'a releasing effected by payment of ransom' or 'redemption,' 'deliverance' or 'liberation procured by the payment of a ransom.' It is a metaphor used to describe God's costly action

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<sup>34</sup>Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* ( Minneapolis: Fortress Press,1993), 121.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*( Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 53.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Colossians* ( Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazo Press, 2014), 97.

<sup>37</sup> Eduard Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, William R. Pohlman and Robert J. Karris, trans.( Philadelphia: Fortress, Press, 1971), 39.

on behalf of his people. He didn't pay any price to anyone, but his mercy required his almighty power and involved the most significant possible depth of suffering.<sup>38</sup> Paul does not suggest that Jesus paid any ransom to the devil to rescue them but instead met the holy demands of God.<sup>39</sup> The believer is already redeemed, and it is only fair for them in Colossae to owe their lives to that Jesus who saved them and not equate him with the demonic and cultic elements in Colossae. They also have the remission of sins, and Paul uses the Word ἄφεσιν from the root word ἄφεσις, which talks of a dismissal or a release and is used for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>40</sup> It means their sinful case file has been dismissed, and they have been released of whatever charges they had. It also means they have been reconciled by God's act of restoring humankind to himself.<sup>41</sup> They have received the forgiveness that flows from the cross. Christ not only canceled their debt but also disarmed the enemy.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Place of the Cosmic Christ in creation**

Verse 15: because of Him, all things were created, whether in the heavens or the earth, visible and invisible, thrones or authorities.

Everything as seen on earth, or the one yet to be seen in heaven or on earth were created because of Jesus. This suggests that he is the reason for the creation. It also means that without him, there would have been no creation. Because all things were created by reason of Him, He is preexistent and

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<sup>38</sup> J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenny, *The International Dictionary of the Bible* (Beggardwood Lane, Basingstoke: Marshal Pickering, 1987 ), 849.

<sup>39</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Complete, Become the Whole Person God Intends You to be New Testament Commentary; Colossians* ( n.p. : Cook International, 1981), 59.

<sup>40</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* ( Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1981), 275.

<sup>41</sup> Steve Carter, ed., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* ( Leicester, England: Intervarsity, 2000), 323.

<sup>42</sup> R.C. Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon: Fullness and Freedom* ( Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity, 1980), 42.

sovereign over the created order.<sup>43</sup> It, therefore, means He deserves the worship of the Church at Colossae and the Catholic Church. Everything the Church has or is because of Him. He rules in every nation and every sphere. His rule does not limit only to the earth but to heaven. He is above all, and every other throne is subject to Him be they the ones that the Colossian brethren have seen or are yet to see or may never see; Christ is above all of them.

16a) all things have been created through him and for him.

The 'all things created' include even the cosmic powers that the opponents at Colossae proclaim as all-powerful forces ruling the world. These cosmic powers cannot, therefore, be superior to Christ.<sup>44</sup> He is the Word by which God made, upholds, and rules creation.<sup>45</sup> Unlike the thought of Arius that Jesus was a creature just that He was higher than normal human beings,<sup>46</sup> Paul counters that idea by stating categorically that all things have been created through Jesus and for Him. They belong to him, meaning he owns them. He was not just the agent of creation but was also the goal of creation. That is to say, creation was created to be his and, worshipping Him is not a misnomer.<sup>47</sup>

Verse 16b): and He is before all things, and in Him, all things consist.

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<sup>43</sup> Michael J. Kruger, ed., *A Biblical -Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Revised*, forward J. Ligon (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016), 308.

<sup>44</sup> Gerhard Krodel, ed., *Proclamation Commentaries, The Deutero-Pauline Letters, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, rev. ed.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 34.

<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 110.

<sup>46</sup> Gregg and Groh, 1.

<sup>47</sup> William Barclay, trans., *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, rev. ed.* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 120.

H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell opine that other things are loose and happen to be consolidated somewhere hence, it is the Divine Word by which they are tied.<sup>48</sup> Paul does not say He was before all things but he uses εἶπεν a verb in the indicative present active 3rd person singular from εἶπαι depicting the 'presentness' of what he is saying. Christ is before all things, be it the ones in eternity past or still to come. He is before all things. That is to say time does not change that reality. This is a description that can only be given to God. Meaning the Cosmic Christ existed as pre-incarnate with God the Father, left that place, and came to earth as a human being in his incarnation.<sup>49</sup> In other words, His coming to earth was not His beginning. He had been and always was. He came from the Father and did not just appear on earth from nowhere.<sup>50</sup> His source is the Father because out of him, he proceeds. Paul uses the word συνέστηκεν to describe the relationship Jesus has with all things. They stand with him, meaning apart from him, nothing can survive by itself. Origen notes that the 'all things' include the various supernatural powers specified in the verse's remaining part.<sup>51</sup>

Verse 17: he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

The word image is the Word εἰκῶν, which also means likeness. Since man cannot see God with their optical eyes, by looking at Jesus, the character and qualities of God are seen, for He

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<sup>48</sup> H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary*( Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 10.

<sup>49</sup> John McRay, *Paul: His Life and His Teaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 296.

<sup>50</sup> William Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology* ( Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017) 147.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Gorday and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, the New Testament IX: Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* ( Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 2000), 15.

is God's one true incarnation.<sup>52</sup> God the Father is not visible to the optical eyes, for no man can see him and live. When Thomas asked Jesus to show them the Father, he asked them if he had been with them all these times, and they still did not understand. If they have seen him, they have already seen the Father. In African Traditional religions, God the creator is distant, but he is also invisible; hence there is a need for intermediaries between him and human beings. Paul thus presents Christ Jesus as that very image of God.<sup>53</sup> The One going to the Father is through him, for he is the way, the truth, and the Life for no one come to the Father but by Him (Jhn 14:6). This points out that using any intermediary apart from Jesus can never take one to the Father. Theodoret of Cyrus describes the word 'image' as sharing the same substance as...<sup>54</sup> It means Christ shares the same substance as God. What makes God, God is the same substance that makes Christ; God hence Jesus is God.

Verse 18a) and He is the head of the Body, the Church.

The idea of the Church suggests that the Church is a living organism, that she is the means through which Christ carries out His purposes and performs his work and that the union existing between Christ and the Church is most intimate and authentic.<sup>55</sup> The Word used for church ἐκκλησία is a borrowed term but then what makes this ἐκκλησία unique is its incorporation into Christ.<sup>56</sup> The Word ἐκκλησία was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens gathered to discuss the

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Hale, *The Applied New Testament Commentary* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1996), 811.

<sup>53</sup> Tokunboh Adeyemo, Solomon Andria, Issiaka Coulibaly et al, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 1477.

<sup>54</sup> Gorday and Oden, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, Gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Ephesians Through Philemon, Vol II* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981), 183.

<sup>56</sup> James W. Thompson, *The Church According to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014), 33.

affairs of the state.<sup>57</sup> F.F. Bruce notes that the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ helps us understand how Paul cannot only speak of believers as "being in Christ" but also of Christ being in them.<sup>58</sup> This Church comprises men and women who have been called out of sin unto the Lord. It portrays various members connected as an organic unity in which there is growth, rescued and protected, loved and nurtured.<sup>59</sup> Thomas Hale notes that nobody can exist without a head. This, according to him, is because if one loses a hand or leg, he can still live but no head, no life!<sup>60</sup> This Body is the Church whom he loved so much and gave his Life for it. Because of this, He builds this Church by calling His people to Himself.<sup>61</sup> According to Milliard J. Erickson, this Church is the manifestation of the kingdom or the reign of God.<sup>62</sup> As an organ, the Church is made up of the called-out ones, and as an organism, Christ is her head, the very source of her life and livelihood.

b) And he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so he (might) have the first place in everything.

This could refer to the authority and preeminence given to the firstborn Son in the Old Testament.<sup>63</sup> This Jesus whom Paul is presenting to these brethren is the firstborn from the dead. He died, and God raised him from among those who are dead. He was the first to rise and not die again. The Word νεκρῶν is an

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<sup>57</sup> Vine, 84.

<sup>58</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 71.

<sup>59</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 111.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Hale, *The Applied New Testament Commentary* (Colorado, Springs: David C. Cook, 1996), 811.

<sup>61</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 853.

<sup>62</sup> Milliard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 1042.

<sup>63</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 1993), 572.

adjective in the standard genitive masculine plural, meaning it is not referring to one dead to a plural. It is also indicative that the Word is an adjective and an adjective describes a noun, meaning if one were to say dead ones, it would make the verse much clearer. W.E Vine notes that the word talks about spiritually dead men.<sup>64</sup> The Cosmic Christ is not just the firstborn from the dead but is the last and eschatological Adam and inaugurates the redemption of all things.<sup>65</sup> He was raised from the dead because He appeared bodily alive to several individuals after He rose.<sup>66</sup> Because He was the firstborn from the dead ones, He also is first in all things. Since He is the firstborn, He therefore is superior overall of creation, including the ones in Colossae.<sup>67</sup>

Verse 19): it pleased (the Father) that in Him (should) dwell all the fullness.

It was the pleasure of the Father that in this same Jesus, should dwell all the fullness of the Godhead. This was what distinguished Him from among the dead gods of this world. The Gnostics distributed the divine powers among various αἰών, but Paul gathers all up in Christ; a complete statement of the deity of Christ. <sup>68</sup> Αἰών refers to an age or period.<sup>69</sup> This is clear that the completeness of the Godhead is present in

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<sup>64</sup> Vine, 273.

<sup>65</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* ( Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 198.

<sup>66</sup> Gerlad O'Collins J. *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus Christ* ( Walton Street, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 85.

<sup>67</sup> W. Harold Mare, *New Testament Background Commentary* ( Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2004), 325.

<sup>68</sup> Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. IV: The Epistles of Paul* ( Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1931), 480.

<sup>69</sup> Vine, 233.



Jesus for all time and all ages. He has always been the reason the Father is pleased.

Verse 20 a) and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself,

Mankind had sinned, and God, in his salvific gesture came to seek and reconcile man back to himself. Paul uses the word ἀποκαταλλάσσω, meaning to harmonize completely. This verse uses it in the aorist infinitive. This suggests that man has been reconciled completely to God including those who are not yet born again. That is one reason for the Great Commission – to tell those who are still wallowing in sin that their sins have already been paid for by Jesus. The Text is clear that it was not man seeking reconciliation but God doing it through Christ. This reconciliation brings salvation to man's lost soul, and this salvation does not preclude inanimate creation.<sup>70</sup> It is, therefore, a fact that we cannot be joined to God otherwise through him.<sup>71</sup> It is this reconciliation that makes joining God possible.

Verse 20b) having made peace through his blood on the cross, whether in the heavens or on earth.

The peace that God has made with Colossians and consequently to all Christians is not a cheap peace that was achieved by mere talks, but it cost the Life of Jesus. The preposition "through" is the Greek διὰ meaning 'because of' or 'on account of.' The peace that has already been made was made on account of Jesus' blood. This is not because of any effort on the part of the Colossians, but it is Jesus who has done this of his own volition. The blood also speaks of a

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<sup>70</sup>Charles H. Talbert , *Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 195-196.

<sup>71</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* , trans., William Prince ( Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 154.

sacrificial death that was the basis for the return of sinful men to a fellowship position with God.<sup>72</sup> The divine act of reconciliation can be accomplished while the means through which such a peace is completed is the death of Christ himself.<sup>73</sup>

### **Exegetical Findings**

Deliverance belongs to the children of God; hence no need to be afraid of the devil or powers of the dark(Verse 13a).

The Church is already experiencing Life in the Kingdom of God( Verse 13b).

The past sins of the Church are no longer held against her.(Verse 14)

Because Christ is and was before all things, He deserves the worship of the Church (Verse 15).

The people who have died in the faith and as part of the Church will still be seen by their loved ones (Verse 18b).

Because the cosmic Christ is head over the Church, she cannot be annihilated (Verse 18a).

The twenty-first-century Church has been reconciled to God and needs not allow the accuser of the brethren to accuse them of the guilt of their past confessed sins (Verse 20).

Implications for the Twenty-First Century Church.

Since the twenty-first-century Church has already been delivered out of the authority of darkness and the devil just

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<sup>72</sup> Herbert M. Carson, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon* ( London: The Tyndale Press, 1963) 46.

<sup>73</sup> David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament*, ed., Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012). 121.

like the Colossians, fear of the powers of the dark is unnecessary. Let her be bold to confront the world or the principalities and powers with the understanding they have already been paralyzed. This means she is not seeking victory over the devil per se, but she is in a battle where the winner has already been declared from the beginning. More so, we are not alone because the Lord is with us and for us.<sup>74</sup> No reason to fear the devil.

Since the twenty-first century Church, like the Colossians, has already been transferred into the kingdom of God's dear Son, they should not live searching for the kingdom. But rather, the Church should live the kingdom realities now, understanding that by faith, she can have a foretaste of the future kingdom life in the now of her existence. Thomas Schreiner avers that the Kingdom of God is also a present reality.<sup>75</sup>

Because the cosmic Christ is the firstborn from the dead, it points to the twenty-first-century Church, that deaths of loved ones in Christ are not the end of life, for we will still meet again. So, if some members in the twenty-first century Church are mourning over the demise of loved ones, they should be encouraged that they will meet again. Louis Berkoff opines that this resurrection of believers is directly connected with the second coming.<sup>76</sup> Meaning as certain as Jesus' second coming is, the resurrection of their loved ones is ascertained.

Since the cosmic Christ is the head of the Church, the Church has his protection and should not fear any destruction by enemies of the Church for those who tried in history failed. Even the Islamic agenda in some parts of the world cannot

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<sup>74</sup>Chip Ingram, *I am Always With You* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2002), 168.

<sup>75</sup> Schreiner, 53.

<sup>76</sup> Louis Berkoff, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 724.

eradicate the Church, for He has built his Church, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Pope Francis concurs that those who have tried to destroy the Church throughout history are themselves killed.<sup>77</sup> Their fate is already determined should they not repent.

The cosmic Christ has reconciled the twenty-first Church century back to God. The allegations of the indicter of God's people over past confessed sins hold no bearing on them. W.J. Parton opines that the devil cannot condemn a poor sinner who is depending on Christ.<sup>78</sup> They should come boldly to the throne of God and obtain mercy. ( Hebrews 4:16)

## Conclusion

The paper discussed the Cosmic Christ as found in Colossians 1:13-20, proving that He is superior and preeminent as well as divine. He is superior to all other elements of this world because, as Paul opines, He is head over all things, most notably, the Church. Since Christ is God and God has an unequalled majesty and unparalleled magnificence, He should be feared ( honored).<sup>79</sup> He is all sufficient and the believer needs nothing to add to the cosmic Christ for He is limitless and universal. He rules indeed in every nation.

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<sup>77</sup> <https://www.americamagazine.org> Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2021.

<sup>78</sup>W. J. Patton, *Pardon for Sin and Assurance of Peace with God* (Dromara, Ireland: Revival Publishing, 2012), 117-118.

<sup>79</sup>David Jeremiah, *What Are You Afraid of ? Facing Down Your Fears With Faith* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 260.

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