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The Deity of Christ (Colossians 1:15–20)

In Colossians 1:15–20, Paul began to extol the greatness, nature, and position of Jesus. He wrote that Jesus is (1) the image of God, which is mentioned in two other places in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3); (2) the firstborn of all creation; (3) the Creator of everything; (4) before all things; (5) the One who holds all together; (6) the head of the church; (7) the source of creation; (8) the firstborn from the dead; (9) preeminent in everything; (10) filled with all fullness; and (11) the basis of reconciliation between God and mankind.

Some commentators believe that verses 15 through 20 constitute a hymn used by the early church. It is thought that verses 15 through 17 are parallel to verses 18 through 20 and that, after a little recon-struction, a meter like that in early hymns is found in these verses. Jesus' entry into and exit from our world is also expressed in 1 Timothy 3:16, which is considered a hymn of the early church. Some think that Paul included familiar sayings or early church

hymns in order to augment his comments concerning the grandeur of Jesus. (See 1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:8, 9; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; Tit. 3:4–8.)

Another assertion is that Paul, in presenting his teachings on Christ, was answering errors in Gnostic doctrine concerning Him. This seems unlikely, since only the seeds of Gnosticism were being sown at that time and fully developed Gnosticism did not appear until the second century. Nevertheless, Paul's discussion about Jesus included information that disproves Gnostic thought.

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD AND THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15).

"He Is the Image of the Invisible God" (1:15a)

Paul referred to Jesus as "the image of the invisible God." The Greek word for "image" (εἰκών, *eikōn*) can be transliterated "icon" and means "likeness." The Eastern Orthodox churches have "icons," paintings or representations in relief of Jesus, Mary, and various saints. Jesus is the "icon" of the Father, the only true manifestation and perfect representation of God. "Image" as used here is different from a picture that shows an external likeness but cannot reveal the inner person and personality. Jesus is the perfect image of the Father because He possesses the completeness of His personality and divine nature. He has made the invisible God visible and understandable. Through Him the fullness of God has been revealed.

Jesus came to reveal the Father to mankind (John 1:18). Those who see Jesus also see the Father (John

12:45; 14:9). "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3a). In all things He is the same substance, nature, glory, and character of the Father. He portrays God's very being. The idea of "the Word" (λόγος, *Logos*; John 1:1, 14) is that Jesus is the true expression of God to all people. The likeness Paul was writing about is not simply Jesus as He was in the flesh, but Jesus the eternal Being.

Jesus would be unable to show the Father to the human race if He Himself were not God; He would be less than a true representation of the Father. The Jews understood that when He called God His Father and claimed to be the Son of God, Jesus was affirming that in His very nature He is "God" (John 10:32–36).

The oneness that Jesus has with the Father also indicates that they have the same nature. After stating, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), Jesus explained the nature of this oneness by saying, "The Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (John 10:38; see also 14:10, 11, 20). Physical beings cannot be one as the Father and the Son are one.

In Jesus' pre-human and post-human existence, He possessed and now possesses the Father's glory and nature. At all times He has shared the Father's attitude, character, and thinking. There is perfect agreement between them in all aspects of their spiritual and mental makeup. Because of this, Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father. He and the Father have the same worldview, the same spiritual, eternal, and moral view. If a person understands Jesus' outlook and viewpoint, he also understands the Father in these aspects. Those who "see," or comprehend, the nature of Jesus understand the nature of the Father.

Man had some glimpses of God but did not have the complete revelation of His nature until Jesus came. Jesus explained to Thomas, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9b; see 12:45). Jesus was God embodied in human flesh (John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16).

Since God is invisible, He cannot be understood from a physical approach. He cannot be and is not to be represented by physically crafted works of artisans. When the Law was given, no form of God was seen. For this reason, no physical representations are to be made of Him (Deuteronomy 4:15–18).

Moses saw God's back, but not His face (Exodus 33:20–23); for no one can see His face and live. God may have transformed Moses' eyes so that he could see what human eyes are unable to see. God, in His glorious splendor, has not been seen and cannot be seen with human eyes (John 1:18; 6:46). As long as a person is in the human body, he cannot see God (1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12). Only after being changed into a spiritual body like God's (1 Corinthians 15:44; Philippians 3:21) will a Christian be able to see God and look on His face (1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:4).

"The Firstborn of All Creation" (1:15b)

Paul also referred to Jesus as "the firstborn." The term "firstborn" (πρωτότοκος, *prōtotokos*) is used elsewhere in the New Testament (Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5). According to Eduard Schweizer, ". . . this expression does not necessarily indicate an elder brother, but only the special position of one who is beloved by his father."[1]

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[1]Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary,* trans. Andrew Chester (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1976; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 67–68.

The firstborn in the Hebrew family had a superior status. He received the father's blessing (Genesis 27:1–4, 19, 34–37) and the birthright (Genesis 43:33). He was to be respected as a leader among his brothers as was Reuben, the oldest of Jacob's sons (see Genesis 37:22, 23). He was to receive a double portion of the inheritance in comparison to what the other sons received (Deuteronomy 21:17). Even though in many cases "firstborn" was used to mean the child who was born first (Genesis 19:34; 27:19), it also was used to mean the one most highly esteemed or loved.

Israel is called God's firstborn (Exodus 4:22). David is referred to as the firstborn (Psalm 89:27), and so is Ephraim (Jeremiah 31:9). Christians are also considered firstborn (Hebrews 12:23), though they are of different birth sequences. Israel was God's privileged nation, not born first among the nations. David was number eight in his family (1 Samuel 16:10, 11), and Ephraim was Joseph's second son (Genesis 41:51, 52). The use of "firstborn" in these passages cannot mean those who were born first. Instead, "firstborn" refers to the status and privileges of the firstborn.

> That the phrase "firstborn of every creature" cannot mean that the Son himself, too, is a creature, the first in a very long line, is clearly established by verse 16. He is prior to, distinct from, and highly exalted above every creature. As the firstborn he is the heir and ruler of all.[2]

Some consider Jesus the firstborn, as mentioned here and other places (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5), because He was Mary's

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[2]William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1964), 72.

first child, the firstborn in Joseph's family. However, this is not the likely meaning. In this setting Paul was presenting Jesus as the One having the prestige and honor of the firstborn in relation to all that has been created. As the firstborn, He has "priority and dominion or sovereignty."[3]

H. C. G. Moule pointed out that Psalm 89:27 makes "the Palestinian Jewish application . . . of the title 'Firstborn' to the Messiah."[4] He stated further concerning the term "firstborn,"

> Studied in its usage, and in these connexions, the word thus denotes *(a) Priority of existence,* so that *the Son* appears as antecedent to the created Universe, and therefore as belonging to the eternal Order of being (see the following context); *(b) Lordship over* "all creation," by this right of eternal primogeniture [existing first].[5]

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that, as the "first-born," Jesus was the first of God's creation. They say,

> [Jesus] is also called God's "Firstborn," as well as his "only-begotten" Son. (Jn. 1:14; 3:16; Heb. 1:6) This means that he was created before all the other spirit sons of God, and that he is the only one who was directly created by God. The Bible explains that this "firstborn" Son shared with Jehovah in creating all other things. (Col. 1:15, 16)[6]

The New World Translation used by the Jehovah's

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[3]A. T. Robertson, *Paul and the Intellectuals: The Epistle to the Colossians*, rev. and ed. W. C. Strickland (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), 44.

[4]H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon,* The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1893; reprint, 1902), 77.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1982), 58.

Witnesses adds the word "other" in Colossians 1:16: "By means of him all [other] things were created."[7] The implication is that Jesus was created first, and then He created everything else. This makes Him a created being like the angels. Jesus is not an angel; He is above the angels (Hebrews 1:4, 6).

The Greek New Testament text states, ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα (*en autō ektisthē ta panta*, "in him were created all things"). The word "other" neither appears in the Greek text nor is implied in it. Jesus created everything that has been created, "and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3). This fact conclusively proves that Jesus is not a created being, unless He created Himself. The translators of the New World Translation realized that His creating all things was a problem in their theology; therefore, they added the word "other" to imply that He did not create *all* things but created all *other* things, excepting Himself.

Jesus cannot be the first being that was created or the first one born to God. He is eternal (Micah 5:2), without beginning or end (Hebrews 7:3). He is the firstborn in the sense of having the highest position of honor, and not first in the sense of time sequence in birth or creation.

Paul referred to Jesus as the "beginning" (Colossians 1:18). This statement and John's statement that Jesus is "the Beginning of the creation of God" (Revelation 3:14b) have been misinterpreted by the Jehovah's Witnesses. In regard to "Beginning" in Revelation 3:14b, the footnote in the NASB is correct

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[7]*The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1961), 1274.

in stating, "I.e. Origin or Source." Some other passages in the New Testament use "beginning" in this sense. The word "beginning" (ἀρχή, *archē*) can mean the starting point and moment at which something began (Matthew 24:8, 21). It is also used of the first cause, the source that caused the beginning. In the Book of Revelation, John used it this way each time it refers to Jesus (21:6; 22:13). He is the "beginning and the end," the One who caused everything to begin and the One who will cause it all to end.

If, in the Revelation passages, "beginning" is not to be considered as "source," then "end" should not be interpreted as "source." The conclusion would be that Jesus had a beginning and will come to an end, which is not true. The meaning is that Jesus is the source of the beginning and also is the source of the "end." He is the "beginning" of all creation, the One who caused everything to be created.

Albert Einstein could be called "the beginning of the theory of relativity." Such a statement would not mean that the theory of relativity brought about Einstein's beginning. Rather, it would mean that, as the source, he originated the theory of relativity. The same is true concerning Jesus: He is the source and cause of the creation, the One through whom all has come into existence.

In John 1:14 Jesus is called "the only begotten" (μονογενής, *monogenēs*), a combination of *mono*, meaning "one," and *genos*, which could be translated as "descendant, trait, or kind."[8] The idea of origin, in

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[8]Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 194.

the sense of having been begotten, is not inherent in the word. The meaning is "one of a kind, unique in nature, in a category all by itself." *Monogenēs* is used of an only son (Luke 7:12; 9:38), Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:42), and of Isaac (Hebrews 11:17). Abraham had other sons besides Isaac, including Ishmael by Hagar (Genesis 16:15) and six others by Keturah (Genesis 25:1, 2). Still, Isaac was Abraham's only begotten son—a unique son, the only one in that category.

Jesus was not begotten in the sense of having an origin. He is one of a kind, unique in nature, in a category all by Himself in His relationship with the Father. The word *monogenēs*, in reference to Jesus, is translated "only begotten" just five times in the New Testament (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). This expression must not be construed to mean that Jesus had a beginning.

The following is a good summary of support for this view:

> (1) The standard lexicons support this meaning (e.g., see MM, pp. 416f.; Bauer, rev., p. 527). (2) The Old Latin MSS rendered *monogenes* by the Lat. unicus ("only") rather than *unigenitus* ("only begotten"). In the Vulgate Jerome changed *unicus* to *unigenitus* ("only begotten") for theological reasons, i.e., to ensure the doctrine that Jesus was "begotten, not made." (In passages that lack this theological interest [Lk. 7:12; 8:42; 9:38] he kept *unicus* as the translation of Gk. *monogenes*.) The Vulgate exercised a formidable influence on the AV and subsequent English translations. (3) The LXX use of *monogenes* for the Heb. yahid and the New Testament usage of the term in Lk. 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; He. 11:17 clearly support the meaning "only." (4) The reference in 1 Clem. 25:2 to the phoenix bird (which was neither born nor begotten) as *monogenes* demands the meaning "only one of its kind."

(5) John's emphasis on Jesus' uniqueness as *monogenes* is underscored by his reservation of the term *huios* to Jesus alone; believers he calls *tekna*, "children."[9]

Jesus is the source of all that has been created. As the Creator of all, He is superior to all that has been created. He is the only and unique Son of God.

THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).

After showing that Jesus is the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15), Paul turned to the majestic truth that Jesus is the Creator of all things. Verses 16 and 17 contain key phrases that must be understood if one is to understand Jesus' relationship to creation.

"For by Him All Things Were Created" (1:16a)

This verse begins with the word "For" (ὅτι, *hoti*), a marker of an explanatory clause. It connects verses 15 and 16, indicating that the following statements are proof of the priority and lordship of Jesus just discussed.

"Created" (ἐκτίσθη, *ektisthē*, from the root κτίζω, *ktizō*) means "brought into existence from nothing." Jesus is "firstborn"—that is, superior to all creation—"for," or because, He created everything. "The

[9]C. B. Hoch, Jr., "Only Begotten," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* rev., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 3:606.

builder of the house has more honor than the house" (Hebrews 3:3b). His position and honor as a firstborn Son are based on His having created "all things," which includes "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) and all the cosmos.

The preposition translated "by" is the Greek ἐν (*en*). Some think *en* should retain its basic meaning of "in": "The preposition 'in' seems to denote Christ as the 'sphere' within which the work of creation takes place."[10]

In all related passages in the New Testament, Jesus' involvement in creation is expressed by the Greek preposition διά (*dia*), which means "through" (John 1:3, 10; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:2). Everything that was created was created "through" Jesus. He was the agent, the mediating cause, through which all was created.

Both the Father and the Son were involved in the Creation. The fact that God created the heavens and the earth and Jesus created "all things" means that Jesus is God but not the Father; as the Son, He cooperated with the Father in the creative process.

Three propositions are given for the existence of the universe and all forms of life: (1) They were created or not created. (2) They were designed or not designed. (3) Non-intellect or intellect brought them into existence.

If the universe was not created, then matter is eternal. Scientists have determined that matter is not eternal, which means that it must have been created.

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[10]E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 197.

The irreplaceable hydrogen that fuels the stars of the universe is being depleted. Such use of energy has not gone on forever and cannot go on forever. At some point in time, the universe had to be given its energy. It must have had a beginning.

If the universe had a beginning, then it was either designed or not designed. Many aspects of the universe—such as movement of celestial bodies, earth's ecology, and the nature of living organisms—show design. If there is design, then the force that created must have had the ability to design.

The design in the universe was brought about either by intellect or by non-intellect. How could the male and the female develop separately from each other so as to be able to reproduce? Millions of years of evolution is not the answer. Every species had to reproduce in one generation or become extinct. Reproduction and many other aspects of nature show intelligent design, which matter cannot produce. Without the help of intellect, matter tends toward disorder instead of order. Since non-intellect does not have the ability to design, the logical conclusion is that an intelligent designer, God, created the universe.

The Bible presents basic arguments for a created universe:

> The heavens are telling of the glory of God (Psalm 19:1a).

> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made (Romans 1:20).

> For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God (Hebrews 3:4).

In order to reject the creation of the universe by an intelligent Being, one must have *faith* that matter is eternal, has the ability to design the many different forms of life, and can maintain order in the universe. This requires the denial of scientific principles. A few simple examples are that life comes from life, depletion of energy demands an energy source, intellect comes from intellect, and design is the result of a designer. The so-called nonbeliever must believe in miracles of nature instead of the creative genius of an all-knowing and all-powerful God.

Gnosticism that developed in the second century denied some of the basic teachings of Christianity. Its adherents taught that God, being pure spirit who dwells in pure light, is totally separate from matter and the darkness of sin. His taking on a material body was impossible, in their thinking, and they considered His creating of matter improbable. They reasoned that God, who is so separate from sin, could not have created a world contaminated with sin. Therefore, they believed that the material universe must have been created as a mistake by a series of aeons, emanations from a good god to a lesser god and eventually to evil matter. The later teaching of Gnostics concerning the origin of the universe conflicts with Paul's teaching in Colossians. He affirmed that Jesus is the One through whom all things were created, not through angelic agents.

"Both in the Heavens and on Earth" (1:16b)

Jesus was instrumental in creating "all things . . . both in the heavens and on earth." "Heavens," plural (οὐρανοῖς, *ouranois*), can refer to the sky (Acts 14:17), to the starry expanse (Ephesians 4:10; Hebrews 4:14;

7:26; 2 Peter 3:7, 10), and to the eternal heavenly abode of God (Matthew 6:9; Hebrews 8:1). Also, the word may mean the realms outside the earth, where both good and evil spirit beings live (Ephesians 1:10). The use of "in" and "on" in this verse may constitute an expression by which Paul meant *all* that inhabits these places. If so, this could include earth's inhabitants and every being outside the earthly realm—even angelic and satanic beings.

Before the creation of heaven and earth, there was no evil. Nothing physical existed. God's spiritual realm alone was in existence. When Jesus comes again, He will restore everything to its original state (Acts 3:20, 21); then nothing physical will exist. Only the eternal, unseen spiritual realm will remain (2 Corinthians 4:18). As Creator, Jesus is superior to all that was created—including earthly beings, evil spirits, and angelic hosts (see 1 Peter 3:22). The only exception to Jesus' authority throughout heaven and earth is the Father, who put all things under Him (1 Corinthians 15:27).

"Visible and Invisible" (1:16c)

Of everything that has been created, more is "invisible" to the unaided eye than is "visible." Everything material is made of invisible particles. The Bible is scientifically correct in stating, "What is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3b). This could refer to God's having made everything from nothing.

If Paul was alluding to what is in the heavens and the earth, then he included visible earthly inhabitants and invisible spirit beings outside the earthly realm, as well as angels of God and of the devil. We are to

keep our eyes on the eternal, unseen, heavenly realm (2 Corinthians 4:18; Colossians 3:1).

As Creator, Jesus is superior to all that has been created, whether it is discernible to human eyes or hidden from them. For this reason, there is no need to worship or to revere anything that is physical or that which cannot be seen, like angelic beings or any other beings. Because of who Jesus is, we are to submit to Him, honor Him, worship Him, and obey Him (Eph. 1:20–23; Heb. 1:6; 5:9).

"Thrones or Dominions or Rulers or Authorities" (1:16d)

To his list of Jesus' creation, Paul next added "thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." Here, "four terms are used in Greek with no precise distinction intended; see comparable lists in Rom 8.38; 1 Cor 15.24; Eph 1.21, 3.10, 6.12; Col 2.10, 15; 1 Peter 3.22."[11] David M. Hay made the following observation:

> The term "thrones" in 1:16d does not seem to be used to mean supernatural powers in any other New Testament passage. "Dominions" is used in this sense again only in Eph 1:21. The term meaning a supernatural "ruler" is used again in 2:10 and 15 as well as in Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 3:10; and 6:12. The term translated "power" occurs alongside "ruler" in all those passages except Rom 8:38. Clearly we are dealing with stereotyped terminology.[12]

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[11]Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translators Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon,* Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1977), 24.

[12]David M. Hay, *Colossians,* Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 58.

By including these four terms, Paul affirmed that Jesus is over every existing power and that each is dependent on Him. He is superior to the highest institutions and beings in the universe. Powers on earth are inferior to Him, as are the heavenly hosts, including angelic and satanic powers (Hebrews 2:14; 1 Peter 3:22; 1 John 4:4). The Colossians were instructed to worship Him alone and not be led into the worship of pagan gods or of angels (Colossians 2:18).

"All Things Have Been Created Through Him and for Him" (1:16e)

Not only were the heavens and the earth created *by* Jesus, but they were also created *for* Him. He is the source of the physical universe and the reason for its existence.

The Greek verb form ἔκτισται (*ektistai*), "have been created," suggests that creation took place at a certain point in time and that which was created continues in its given form through and for Jesus. "The tense of 'have been created' . . . at the end of the verse is perfect, referring to the enduring result of the creative act."[13] All creation exists for His glory and honor. This was the Father's purpose: that through His creation Jesus would be exalted both by earthly and by heavenly beings.

In the phrase "for Him," the preposition "for" (εἰς, *eis*, which primarily means "into") in this case expresses "purpose or goal."[14] The same meaning of *eis* is found in Acts 2:38. Peter stated that the Jews were to repent and be baptized *eis*, "for," the forgiveness of

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[13]Simpson and Bruce, 199, n. 85.
[14]Bratcher and Nida, 24.

sins. Jesus used *eis* when He said that His blood was shed "for" the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28). The end purpose and goal of the shedding of Jesus' blood and of repentance and baptism is forgiveness of sins, even as Jesus is the purpose and goal of creation. The universe is centered in Christ.

The universe exists for Jesus; for He is the One for whom it was created. Similarly, Paul wrote, "For from Him and through Him and to [*eis*] Him are all things" (Romans 11:36a), and ". . . there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for [*eis*] Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (1 Corinthians 8:6). There is no contradiction in saying that we exist for the Father and for the Son. The spiritual nature of the righteous has been made possible by the Son and for His glory, that He might deliver them to the Father. Those who now belong to the Son and are in His kingdom will in the end "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43a), when He will give the kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

THE ONE WHO HOLDS ALL THINGS TOGETHER

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17).

"He Is Before All Things" (1:17a)

The fact that Jesus is "before all things" means that He is not a part of the things that were created. "Before" (πρὸ, *pro*) can be used both of priority in time and of rank. At least twice in the New Testament, it is used in the sense of rank ("above all"; James

5:12; 1 Peter 4:8). Perhaps Paul intended both ideas. According to his preceding arguments, Jesus is both above and before all.

Paul affirmed that Jesus "is" before all things, not that He "was" before all things. By using "is," he implied that Jesus continues to be before all things. J. B. Lightfoot correctly observed that the present tense "is" (ἐστιν, *estin*) "declares that this preexistence is absolute existence."[15] Jesus expressed the same truth by stating that He was with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5).

"Things" refers to everything that is material or spiritual in nature, including every living and non-living thing that is visible or invisible to the unaided human eye. The fact that Jesus is before all things means that He is eternal and is superior to everything. When everything began, He already existed (John 1:1). He is before all things because He had no beginning.

"And in Him All Things Hold Together" (1:17b)

Jesus sustains what He brought into existence. "He . . . upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3a). Paul said, "And in Him all things hold together." Everything came into being "by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3). The word by which all was created is the same word that reserves the heavens and earth for the fire of the last day (2 Peter 3:5–7). The beginning and the ongoing existence of the world depend on Jesus. Through His word, all was created and continues to exist; and by His word

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[15]J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, rev. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1916), 153.

that creation will cease to exist. It now continues to exist because the word of His power holds all things together.

The word translated "hold together" (συνίστημι, *sunistēmi*) expresses the idea that Jesus not only caused His creation to hold together but also continues to hold it together. Because everything is held together through Him, the universe is not in chaos. It continues to be harmoniously controlled through Jesus' power. He is the unifying power that sustains and maintains the created universe.

THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH AND SUPREME

> He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him (Colossians 1:18, 19).

At this point, Paul turned from his discussion of Jesus' relationship to the universe to His relationship with the church. Jesus is not only the Ruler of the universe but is also over the church.

"He Is Also Head of the Body, the Church" (1:18a)

In addition to being the image of God, the firstborn of all creation, and the Creator of the universe, Jesus "is also head of the body, the church."

Four times in this context, Paul stated, "He is." Jesus is the image of God (v. 15), before all things (v. 17), the head of the body (v. 18a), and the beginning (v. 18b). In other passages Paul taught that Jesus is head of "the church, the body" (Ephesians 1:22, 23;

5:23). In Colossians he used the reverse order, "the body, the church" (v. 18a; see 1:24).

The relationship of the head to the body is an important one. The head controls, directs, and governs the activities of the body, while the body submissively responds to the desires of the head (Ephesians 5:24). Jesus, as the head, acts and accomplishes His purposes through the body. This body, the church, exists to serve Jesus' desires; its members act as His earthly representatives. The head needs the body to function, and the body needs the head to control its functions. The body is dependent on the head for its care and well-being. Jesus' relationship with the body is personal; it is different from an owner's relationship to a building. The church, like a person, is functional only when a proper correlation exists between the head and the body.

A. T. Robertson's comment on Jesus' headship is worthy of consideration:

> He has lordship and dominion over his church, precisely as the head rules the body. There is a vital relation between the body and the head. The body, however, does not give orders to the head. It may give pain, and often does, but it is under the control of the head and subordinate to the head. . . . The body needs the Head and the Head needs the body to do his will and to carry out his orders.[16]

The body and the church are the same. Robertson correctly commented, "Here Paul employs two words, 'the body' [and] 'the church,' the one in explanatory apposition to the other. . . ."[17] Thus the church is the

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[16]Robertson, 50.
[17]Ibid., 49–50.

body of Christ, the church of Christ.

Paul wrote, "the body," not "the bodies." By writing "the body," Paul implied the one and only body, the one church. In referring to the church using the figure of a body, Paul always chose a singular, never a plural, noun (1 Corinthians 12:24, 25, 27; Ephesians 1:23; 4:12, 16; 5:23, 30; Colossians 1:24; 2:19). Numerous times he referred to the body as being one (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12, 13, 20; Ephesians 2:16; 4:4; Colossians 3:15). In writing "Christ's body" (1 Corinthians 12:27) or "His body" (Ephesians 1:23; 5:30; Colossians 1:24), Paul taught that the one body of Christ is the church of Christ. The plural "churches"—as in "the churches of Christ greet you" (Romans 16:16)—was used only in reference to local congregations, not to the church universal.

The concept of the body being the church has important implications.

> It is probably from this conception of the church as the body of Christ that we can best understand how Paul can speak of believers as being "in Christ" and at the same time of Christ as being in them. For they are "in Christ" as members of His body, "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27); He is in them because it is His life that animates them. We may compare the use made of another organic analogy in John 15:1 ff.; there the branches are in the vine and the vine at the same time is in the branches.[18]

"Body" (σῶμα, *sōma*) is used in the sense of a group or unit of people, as the phrases "student body" and "legislative body" indicate functioning units of members. Paul compared the church to the human

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[18]Bruce, 205.

body (Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13), as one organized unit with each member having abilities that can help with the function of the complete body.

The word "church" (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*) in the New Testament refers to a group of people, but never to a building. Before being introduced into the Christian vocabulary, *ekklēsia* was used to refer to a regularly summoned political body—the town council—in a Greek community. In the New Testament it is used of the entire group of Jesus' followers (Matthew 16:18), local congregations of Christ (Romans 16:16), churches of a region (1 Corinthians 16:1), Christians assembled (1 Corinthians 14:23), members unassembled (Acts 8:1), and a nonreligious assembly (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). In 1:18 we find the first appearance of the word "church" in Colossians. It means here, as in verse 24, all of Jesus' followers, not a particular congregation. Later, Paul used it twice of local congregations (4:15, 16).

Jesus' relationship to the church reveals its importance. He is its builder and owner (Matthew 16:18), purchaser (Acts 20:28), foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), head (Ephesians 1:22, 23), and Savior (Ephesians 5:23). God has revealed His wisdom through the church (Ephesians 3:10). Jesus will present it to Himself holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25–27).

The church belongs to Jesus because He bought it with His own blood. For this reason it can be called "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16) or "the church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2), inasmuch as Jesus is God (John 1:1, 2). A congregation may be identified as the church of a certain city, such as the "church in Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). We also find biblical authority for referring to churches made up

of a certain segment of society, such as "churches of the Gentiles" (Romans 16:4), and also churches in a region, as in "churches of Galatia" (1 Corinthians 16:1). Other biblical phrases include "churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33), "church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15), and "church of the firstborn [ones]" (Hebrews 12:23). Acts 5:11 simply says "the . . . church."

The church is "the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:18, 19), "the flock" (Acts 20:28), "His body" (Ephesians 1:22, 23), and the "household [or family] of God" (1 Timothy 3:15). Members of the body of Christ, the church, are citizens of the kingdom (Ephesians 2:19), sheep of the flock (John 10:16), and children of God, members of His family (Galatians 3:26, 27). The church is made up of those who have been cleansed by the death of Jesus. Baptism puts people into the kingdom of God (John 3:5), the one body (1 Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15). Those whose names are written in the Book of Life are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 21:27). They will enter that "holy city" (see Revelation 21:2, 10; 22:19).

The heavenly destiny of the church is deduced from a number of biblical statements. The sons of Jesus' kingdom will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father (Matthew 13:37–43). Jesus will give eternal life to the sheep of His flock (John 10:27, 28). He is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). As God's children, we are heirs (Romans 8:16, 17; Galatians 4:7). Our inheritance is reserved in heaven (1 Peter 1:3, 4).

Acceptable members of Christ's church are those who submit to Him (Ephesians 5:24). The faithful Christian responds to Him because of love and fear

of Him (John 14:15, 21, 23; Philippians 2:12; 1 Peter 1:17). Jesus said, "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26).

"And He Is the Beginning, the Firstborn From the Dead" (1:18b)

Paul wrote, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." As in verse 15, Paul referred to Jesus as "the firstborn" (for more on the "firstborn" and "beginning," see the discussion on 1:15b). Earlier, he had said "the firstborn of all creation"; this time he said "the firstborn from the dead" (see Revelation 1:5).

Jesus was not the first person to be raised from the dead. Elijah raised the son of the widow who lived in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:21, 22). Elisha brought back to life the son of a Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:34–36). A man who was thrown into Elisha's grave lived again (2 Kings 13:20, 21). Jesus raised Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:22, 35–42), the son of a widow who lived in Nain (Luke 7:11–15), and Lazarus (John 11:43, 44). These were resurrected before Jesus was raised. While Jesus was not the first to be raised, He is the most prominent. In this sense, He is "the firstborn" of all who were raised from the dead. He was resurrected as the first raised to die no more (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23). Through His resurrection, He has opened the way for others to follow (Romans 6:8).

Instead of meaning that Jesus was the first to be raised chronologically, Paul was emphasizing the preeminence of Jesus. "From the dead" implies that He came from death to His place of prominence. Peter taught this truth at Pentecost. Jesus was raised

from death to sit on David's throne (Acts 2:30, 31) when He ascended to rule over all things (Ephesians 1:20–23; 1 Peter 3:22).

The headship of Jesus over the church is based on His preeminence in all things throughout the universe. He is not only over the universe, but He is also head of the church. He now rules over every institution in the universe.

"So That He Himself Will Come To Have First Place in Everything" (1:18c)

Paul continued, "So that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." "To have first place" (πρωτεύω, *prōteuō*) appears only here in the New Testament. However, it is used many times in its adjective form, πρῶτος (*prōtos*). This word means "first" and is the source of the English term "proton."

Jesus' prominence is not only innate, but it is also derived through His resurrection. Since Jesus is first and primary of those raised, He also has a preeminent position over all who will be raised. Through His victory over death, He became the source of life. As the victor who has defeated all enemies (Hebrews 2:14), He is now preeminent over all and has no rival within the enemy camp. He can give victory over death to all who live for Him (1 Corinthians 15:55–57).

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He was placed over every earthly and heavenly power. He now has all power in heaven and earth.[19] The only One He is not over is the Father, who put all things under Him (1 Corinthians 15:27). Even though He rules over all,

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[19] See Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:25–27; Ephesians 1:20–23; Philippians 2:10, 11; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 1:5; 12:5.

some enemies have not yet been subdued by Him (1 Corinthians 15:25, 26).

"For It Was the Father's Good Pleasure" (1:19a)

Paul spoke of fullness dwelling in Jesus "for . . . the Father's good pleasure." "For" (ὅτι, *hoti*), also translated "because," relates this verse to what was said about Jesus in verses 16 through 18. "Good pleasure" (εὐδοκέω, *eudokeō*), or "pleased," is the same verb that was used when the Father said He was pleased with Jesus at His baptism, in quoting Isaiah's prophecy, and at His transfiguration (Matthew 3:17; 12:18; 17:5).

The Father fulfilled His eternal purpose in giving Jesus His exalted position. Jesus did not seek to take this exaltation from the Father (Philippians 2:6), but graciously received it from Him. Jesus came to do the Father's will, for He and the Father are one in purpose (John 10:30). Jesus' motive in everything He did was to obey the Father's will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; Hebrews 10:9). Because of Jesus' willing obedience in His death on the cross, the Father "highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

Through Jesus and also His children, the Father is able "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). This does not mean that God causes every event to happen. He gives each person the right to choose (Joshua 24:15), even as Jesus indicated that He had free will when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39).

"For All the Fullness to Dwell in Him" (1:19b)

God's will, or pleasure, was "for all the fullness

to dwell in Him." "Dwell" (κατοικέω, *katoikeō*) is a present infinitive form, meaning that this fullness *continues* to dwell. Jesus' earthly dwelling is expressed by "dwelt" (John 1:14), an aorist form that indicates a one-time habitation. The fullness that dwells in Jesus is not a one-time fullness; it is continuing in nature.

"Fullness," from the Greek word πλήρωμα (*plērō-ma*), is used here of completeness, as in John 1:16 and Ephesians 1:23; 3:19; 4:13. Later in Colossians, Paul came back to this thought and emphasized a certain aspect of the fullness that is in Christ: "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). In Him are salvation, resurrection, all authority, power, and manifestation of the Father. Also, continuing to exist in Him at present are the fullness of all God's purposes for mankind and the complete representation of the Father's nature.

The Father's divine purpose is achieved in Jesus. Mankind has no other Creator, Lord, Teacher, Lawgiver, or Savior than Jesus. In relationship to everything that has been created, Jesus is all in all. In Him all purposes of God relative to creation are completed. Through His suffering on the cross, He was made perfect, complete, as the Savior of mankind (Hebrews 5:9). Besides all of this, in Him dwells the full power of God and the divine nature of Deity, undiluted and fully made known. Jesus is not lacking in any attribute.

In that He meets every need of the inhabitants of earth, it is evident that God has made all fullness to dwell in Him. The Colossians did not need to turn to anyone other than Jesus. The same is true for people today. If they need salvation, Jesus adequately gives a supply. If they need spiritual help, Jesus is their helper. If they need teaching, Jesus is the only true

teacher. He is man's only Savior (Acts 4:12) and mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). As mediator, He has provided reconciliation for those who are separated from God. Fullness for Christians dwells in Jesus. "The work of the teacher is to lead people to find their fullness in Christ alone: *he does not possess anything beyond Christ to give to his people.*"[20]

Churches that seek to satisfy spiritual needs apart from Jesus have wandered away from the only One who can meet those needs. They have turned from Him to an inadequate source. When Israel turned from God to idols, Jeremiah wrote, "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

Outside of Jesus, there is no fullness. Within Jesus is everything Christians need to complete their relationship with God. Paul laid the foundation in this passage and in Colossians 2:10a, when he wrote, "In Him you have been made complete."

THE BASIS OF RECONCILIATION

And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1:20).

"And Through Him to Reconcile All Things to Himself" (1:20a)

After stating that the fullness of God is in Christ,

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[20]R. C. Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon: Fullness and Freedom,* The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 53.

Paul gave assurance that through Jesus the Father has made reconciliation possible. "And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself" implies two truths: (1) Because of sin, mankind is separated and alienated from God, and (2) God is the One who has made possible a friendly relationship through Jesus. Sin separates man from God, severs his relationship with Him, and makes him an enemy of God (Isaiah 59:1, 2; Ephesians 2:12, 13; James 4:4). The need of all mankind is to make peace with God and become His friend. Abraham is an example of a person whose faith and works resulted in his being called a friend of God (James 2:22, 23).

Reconciliation is found in the fullness of Christ. This was arranged according to the pleasure of God. Hay wrote,

> The infinitive "to reconcile" in verse 20a is grammatically . . . parallel with "to reside," in verse 19, both infinitives completing the sense of "was pleased." God in all God's fullness was pleased to be in and to act through the Son. The formulation is obviously close to that of 2 Cor 5:19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," although there are some significant differences. The verb for "reconcile" is different; indeed, the one used in 1:20 (Gk. *apokatalassein*) is not found anywhere in earlier Greek literature and may have been coined from the one Paul uses in 2 Cor 5:18–19 and Rom 5:10 (Gk. *katalassein*).[21]

"Reconciliation" means the removal of barriers that separate two parties so that they can be friends. Jesus has done His part to make this possible, removing the barrier of sin by bearing the sins of mankind

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[21]Hay, 62.

on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). Man's responsibility is to do Jesus' will in order to be reconciled. God meets man in Christ, where reconciliation is made possible (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus has taken the curse of sin upon Himself and become sin for mankind (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The next move is up to the individual: A person must enter Christ in order to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20b; Galatians 3:26, 27). God has completed His work of reconciliation through Jesus. He will do no more.

Mankind is not separated from God based on Adam and Eve's sin. We have brought about our own separation from Him (Genesis 3:23, 24). Children come into the world not knowing about good and evil (Deuteronomy 1:39). Because they are blind to what is right and wrong, they do not have sin (John 9:41). The kingdom of heaven belongs to them (Matthew 19:14). Each person is separated from God because of his own sins (Isaiah 59:1, 2; James 1:14). Jesus came to save His people from *their* sins (Matthew 1:21; emphasis added). Peter told the people to be baptized "for the forgiveness of *your* sins" (Acts 2:38), and Paul was told, ". . . be baptized, and wash away *your* sins" (Acts 22:16). No one was ever told to do anything in order to be forgiven of the sin of Adam or sin inherited from Adam.

As in 1:6, 23, "all things" does not mean every possible thing in the universe. In the Greek, only the adjective πάντα (*panta*), meaning "all," appears. "Things" is not found in the Greek text, but it is implied by the word form.

"All" would not include the physical universe, animals, or other creatures, for they did nothing to separate themselves from God. Paul must have meant

"all" whose sins have separated them from God and are thus in need of reconciliation. Jesus did not come to reconcile those who are in a right relationship with God (Matthew 9:13), but "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Within the entire universe, humans are the only beings that need and can be granted reconciliation with God. "All" must mean that Jesus has made possible the reconciliation of all people who have ever lived.

Some have sought to force "all things" to mean universal salvation. Paul did not mean that everyone will unconditionally be reconciled to God. Reconciliation has been made possible through Jesus, but a response is necessary to receive it. Paul made a plea for the Corinthians to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18–20). Jesus saves those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). He will give everlasting punishment to those who disobey (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9). Jesus stated that there are two different destinies: "destruction" and "life" (Matthew 7:13, 14); "eternal punishment" and "eternal life" (Matthew 25:46); "resurrection of life" and "resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29; KJV).

The false doctrine of universal salvation began to be taught early in the writings of the Church. "It was Origen who was probably the first Christian universalist. In his youthful work *De Principiis* he suggested this thought of universal, final restoration for all."[22]

"Having Made Peace Through the Blood Of His Cross; Through Him, . . . Whether Things On Earth or Things in Heaven" (1:20b)

Next, Paul spoke of "having made peace through

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[22]Hendriksen, 81.

the blood of His cross." Jesus shed His blood to forgive sins (Matthew 26:28) so that mankind could be at peace with God. The wall of sin must be removed before God and man can be brought together in peace. No one, during this life on earth, may ever know why God will not forgive sin without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). The principle of "life for life" (Exodus 21:23; Deuteronomy 19:21) may govern reconciliation. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Jesus took the curse and penalty of sin on Himself (Galatians 3:13) by giving His lifeblood in order to provide forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, eternal life, and peace with God.

When Jesus was born, the angels sang of peace: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased" (Luke 2:14). Jesus promised that He would give peace to His followers in the face of tribulation (John 14:27; 16:33). Peace with God comes to those who are motivated by faith (Romans 5:1; Hebrews 11:6) to "[do] good" (Romans 2:10). Spiritually-minded people can find peace (Romans 8:6), but those who do evil do not know the way of peace (Romans 3:17). Peace through reconciliation is revealed as good news for mankind (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 2:17).

At the end of the verse, Paul repeated, "Through Him, I say," and added, "whether things on earth or things in heaven." "Things" could have a wider application than human beings, but why would the blood of Jesus be necessary to redeem created "things"? His blood was shed to forgive sin (Matthew 26:28). Only man, not all creation, sinned.

One explanation is that, because of Adam's sin, a curse was placed on everything that was created,

including the earth, the solar system, and the starry heavens. Jesus lifted this curse through the cross, thus making possible a resolution of the disharmony created by Adam's sin. The final result will be the restoration of all things. Even the universal harmony and peace that existed before the curse (Genesis 3:17b) will be restored to creation (Romans 8:18–23). Herbert M. Carson suggested that this is what Paul meant:

> But this reconciliation is not limited to men. It applies to the whole order of created being. It is significant that Paul does not here say "all men", which would be contrary to his normal teaching, but *all things*. The phrase is indefinite and suggests the completeness of the plan of God. Not only is sinful man reconciled, but the created order which has been made subject to vanity because of sin (see [Romans 8:20–23]) will share also in the fruit of the mighty act of atonement on the cross.[23]

Paul did not write that Jesus' death reconciled things on earth *with* things in heaven, as some have concluded. His death provided reconciliation for things *on* earth and for things *in* heaven. The meaning must be that Jesus provided reconciliation for all who need reconciliation. Since only those who have offended God need to be reconciled to Him, material things, animals, and other living creatures can be eliminated. The ones who can offend God are evil spirits, angels, and people. Good angels do not need reconciliation. Bad angels and evil spirits need reconciliation but will not receive it. Sinful mankind

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[23]Herbert M. Carson, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), 46–47.

is all that is left to reconcile.

Perhaps no difficulty arises in understanding peace being made available through Jesus to sinful man on earth—but who in heaven needs to find peace through Jesus? Nothing that is defiled can enter heaven (Revelation 21:27), God's abode. Further, the idea that the reconciliation made possible by the redemptive act of Jesus is extended to angelic beings who sinned would contradict Peter's statement concerning sinful angels. They are chained in darkness, being reserved for judgment (2 Peter 2:4). They are not *in heaven*, for they have been "cast . . . into hell" (ταρταρώσας, *tartarōsas*)—literally, "cast into tartaras"—to wait for their final judgment. "Judgment" in this case may best be translated "condemnation," as in Matthew 23:14 (see Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47; 23:40; Romans 3:8; 13:2; 1 Timothy 3:6; 5:12; Jude 4).

In contending that the "created order" is what is included in reconciliation, Carson overlooked the fact that Paul did not say "the earth" or "heaven," but "on" earth and "in" heaven. The reconciliation is for what is *on* the earth and *in* the heavens, not for earth and the heavens themselves. The earth and the heavens will pass away (Matthew 24:35) and be burned up (2 Peter 3:10–12). The curse placed on the earth because of Adam and Eve's sin (Genesis 3:17) is not what Jesus will be reconciling.

Carson noted that Paul did not include "under the earth," as he did in Philippians 2:10. "Under the earth" means the forces of evil. If he had included these, Paul would have been teaching that Jesus provided reconciliation for Satan, his evil spirit messengers, and all evildoers.

A plausible conclusion is that Paul meant that

Jesus made reconciliation possible for those *on* the earth as well as for people who died before the Crucifixion. During their lifetimes, these had tried to do God's will, but they were already dead and were *in* the heavenly realm outside the earth, the Hadean realm, before reconciliation was made possible through Jesus' death. Through His sacrifice, they are reconciled to God (see Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:15). As Peter said of David (Acts 2:34), these are not yet with God in heaven. However, because they are outside the earthly realm, they can be referred to as being in the heavens (Ephesians 6:12).

Paul must have been making a distinction between locations by using two different Greek prepositions: *epi* ("on") for those *on* earth and *en* ("in") for those *in* heaven. Paul was not referring to the earth itself as being reconciled, but to people living "on earth." He did not mean heaven itself, but those who are in the heavens—that is, in Hades, a place outside the earthly realm but not in the heavenly realm where God is.

Some scholars consider verses 15 through 20 to be a "hymn" concerning Jesus, but they differ widely concerning its arrangement. Whether or not it served as a hymn, this section laid the foundation for Paul's next remarks.

Hay explained the significance of Jesus' supreme qualities:

> The description of the Son as the image (15a) prepares for the statement about Christians as bearing the image of their creator (3:10, 11). The claim that he is the head of the church (1:18) is explained further in 2:10, 19. The statement that the Son is preeminent in everything (1:18) prepares the way for similar declarations and warnings

in 1:28; 2:3, 6–7, 17, 19; 3:3, 11; 4:1. The assertion about the Christ's death as the source of salvation links 1:20 with 1:14, 22; 2:11–15; and 3:13. The thought that the church is Christ's body reappears in 1:24 and 2:19. Assertions about dying and rising with Christ (2:12–13, 20; 3:1, 5) clarify the meaning of "firstborn from the dead" (1:18a). The reference to angelic powers in 1:16 is echoed in references to supernatural beings in 2:8, 15, 18, and 20. The universal significance of the Son, stressed throughout 1:15–20, explains why the gospel is proclaimed everywhere (1:6, 23, 27–28; 3:11; 4:3–6). Finally the hymn's positive view of the world as God's creation though the Son warrants the polemic against the false teachers' asceticism in 2:16–23 and the positive teaching about life in the world in 3:5–4:6.[24]

[24]Hay, 53.