

Mark A McGee

The Cosmic Christ

By

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The Cosmic Christ

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Introduction

I first taught about the Cosmic Christ more than 30 years ago. It was so exciting to share with other Christians the Power and Glory of our Lord. I loved the truth then and love it even more now. One of the neat things about being a child of God is how we continue to grow in Him year after year. We can go back to Scriptures we've read and studied many times before and receive new insight and guidance from God's Spirit. I love studying with the Holy Spirit because He is the Author of the Word of God. He can tell us how to interpret and understand the Bible better than anyone else. Let's look at what we find in Colossians about the Cosmic Christ.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Colossians 1:1-

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Colossae was a city of mercantile importance on the Lycus River, about 12 miles from Laodicea. Most likely the church had been founded by Epaphras. Paul had probably never visited there. The modern town of Chonas is at the Colossian ruins. It's a real place. People lived there - died there. Christians worshiped there and shared their faith with their neighbors,

families and friends.

Apparently, Epaphras and his colleagues went to Rome about 60 A.D. to see the Apostle Paul, who was waiting to appeal his case to the emperor. Epaphras loved the people of Colossae. They were his people. He had preached the Word of God to them, had seen them receive Christ with gladness and grow in their faith. But Epaphras was also greatly concerned about what was happening in the Colossian church. They faced a great enemy that could potentially destroy them from the inside. It was beyond Epaphras' ability to solve the issues as an elder of the church, so he traveled a great distance to get help from the Apostle to the Gentiles. The Colossians would certainly listen to him. Paul was in Roman custody, so he dealt with the church's problems through a letter he sent to Colosse with Tychicus and Onesimus.

The primary problem in the Colossian church was the teaching of false doctrine. The heresy would be given the name of "Gnosticism" in the second century because of its emphasis on spiritual redemption through knowledge (gnosis). The heresy could adapt itself to Jewish, Christian or pagan religions as the occasion required. General ideas included metaphysical dualism, mediating beings, and redemption through knowledge. These people taught that because man was bound in the world of evil matter, he could approach God only through mediating angelic beings. By the aid of these powers and through allegorical and mythical interpretations of the sacred writings,

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spiritual enlightenment could be achieved and one's redemption from the world of sin and matter could be assured.

Does this sound familiar to you? It should. We're surrounded by gnostic "newagism" today. Visit some of the best-known secular bookstores in your city and see how many bookshelves are dedicated to Christian books and how many are dedicated to New Age books. Then, look at some of the titles that are included on the Christian book shelves and you'll see how "new gnosticism" is influencing the Church today. Many of the so-called "Christian books" I've looked at in book stores are thinly disguised new age books. It wasn't like that 30 to 40 years ago. Most Christians would have known better back then, but gnosticism is a sinister belief that slowly infiltrates the Church - then steals, kills and destroys the faith of many. It's been growing steadily in that direction for decades, but is now a full-blown heresy in the 21st Century. How Paul addressed the Colossian problem is similar to what we need to do in our churches today. In a strategy used elsewhere, Paul took the terminology of the errorists to attack their teaching, and in the process, presented the Christian Church with the precious doctrine of "The Cosmic Christ."

The first two chapters of Colossians are doctrinal (what to believe). The last two chapters are practical (what to do with what you believe). Its dominant theme is the fullness and pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, and the full completeness of Christian believers in Him, as against the mysticism and

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asceticism enjoined by the philosophies and traditions of men.

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The Supremacy of Christ

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Colossians 1:15-20

Here are some basic observations of this portion of Scripture:

Important Words

image, invisible, firstborn, all, creation, created, before, head, beginning, preeminence, fullness, reconcile

Pronouns

He, Him, His, Himself -- 12 of the pronouns refer to Christ. This paragraph centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Verse 15

"He" is Christ Jesus - "image" is eikon. It means "likeness, representation, manifestation."

"invisible" is aoratou. It means "unseen."

Jesus is the "firstborn" over all creation. Though the word "over" is not in the original text, it does help us understand the meaning of the word. Dr. Wuest wrote: "The Greek word implied two things: priority to all creation and sovereignty over all creation." ("Word Studies in the Greek New Testament," Dr. Kenneth Wuest, 1953, Eerdman's Publishing) The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states: "Christ, as the 'firstborn of all creation,' is not only prior to it in time, but above it in power and authority ... it denotes His status and character and not His origin; the context does not admit the idea that He is part of the created universe."

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The term "firstborn" is used in relation to Christ in five passages:

1. Colossians 1:15 where His Eternal relationship with the Father is in view
2. Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5 in reference to His Resurrection
3. Romans 8:29 for His position in relationship to the Church
4. Hebrews 1:6 where it speaks about His Advent

Being the "firstborn" means Christ is first in every way. The Church should never allow anyone or anything to usurp Christ's prominence and preeminence in faith and worship. But look at the message and practice of the Church today and what do you see? Is Christ truly #1 or are we only paying lip service to Him? Have we exchanged the glory of Christ for the glory of another? If we have, what can we do to return the beliefs of the Church to the doctrines of the Apostles and Prophets? How can we be true again to the Truth of God?

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The Heart of the Problem

Paul first gave thanks to God for the Colossian believers because of their faith in Christ Jesus and love for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for them in Heaven (Colossians 1:3-5). Then, Paul introduced the heart of the problem:

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Colossians 1:9-14

Paul told the Colossians he was praying that they would be "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." The false doctrine the Colossian believers were facing 20 centuries ago was eating away at their knowledge of God's will. Because of that, they lacked wisdom

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and spiritual understanding.

I'm reminded of something C.S. Lewis wrote in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*. In the book, Screwtape (Satan) wrote a series of letters to Wormwood (a demon) about guiding his patient (a human) away from the knowledge of their mutual Enemy (God). Even after Wormwood's patient became a Christian, Screwtape continued to advise the demon about keeping the new Christian from becoming effective in the Army of God - "As always, the first step is to keep knowledge out of his mind." How true! Even after people are saved by grace through faith in Christ, Satan can continue to influence their thinking by keeping them from focusing on the knowledge of God's will. Satan accomplishes this in a Christian's life in many ways. Here are several off the top of my head.

1. Christians believing in their own sufficiency, instead of depending on the sufficiency of God
2. Christians being proud of their faithfulness, instead of boasting of the One Who is Faithful in all things
3. Christians trusting their personal interpretation of God's Word, instead of trusting God's Word for His Interpretation
4. Christians believing they know a lot about being spiritual, instead of looking to the Spirit of God to train them to be like Christ
5. Christians believing they don't really matter to God,

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- instead of understanding that God has already given them everything that really matters to Him
6. Christians focusing on the supposed importance of their temporary positions in local assemblies, instead of appreciating the real importance of their eternal position in the Body of Christ
 7. Christians depending on the power of their presence, instead of depending on the Presence of His Power
 8. Christians desiring places of prominence in their world, instead of desiring God's Will to be prominent in their lives
 9. Christians insisting on their way in life, instead of praying for God's Way in their life
 10. Christians becoming easily disappointed in everything Christian, instead of rejoicing in everything belonging to Christ
 11. Christians looking at things through the world's perspective, instead of seeing everything from God's Perspective
 12. Christians fretting about their challenges in life, instead of enjoying their opportunities to serve
 13. Christians fighting against each other about insignificant differences, instead of fighting with each other against the common enemy
 14. Christians telling others how much they know, instead of listening to how much God Knows
 15. Christians trusting in the riches of this world, instead of

- trusting in the God Who Created this world and everything in it
16. Christians doing what they love, instead of loving what God Does
 17. Christians complaining about what they don't have in this world, instead of rejoicing about what they do have in Heaven
 18. Christians pitying their place in this life, instead of praying for a place in eternity for others
 19. Christians believing that the Grace of God means they can do whatever they want, instead of understanding that God's Grace means doing what He wants
 20. Christians viewing their faith in Christ as one of many choices in life, instead of understanding that Faith is the One Choice Christ made for us

Satan has been "tricking" Christians for centuries, so his list is much bigger than this. We need to find ways to deal with our enemy's chicanery. Fortunately, God has already given us His secrets to dealing with the devil.

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which

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you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." Ephesians 6:13-18

Do you see the role that knowledge plays in a Christian's ability to withstand in the evil day? Putting on the whole armor of God begins with girding our waist with "truth" and ends with taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the "word of God." What is the Word of God? Better question - Who is the Word of God?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." John 1:1-3

The Greek word for "word" is logos. In the beginning was the logos, and the logos was with God, and the logos was God. The Greeks understood the word logos to mean the expression of thought. Jesus is the Logos of God - the very Expression of God's Mind. This is where the Colossians were running into serious trouble. Satan was confusing them about what was in God's Mind. Because the Colossian believers were confused about that, they were confused about what to believe and how to behave. That's why Paul wrote them he was asking God to

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fill them with the "knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," that they might "walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work," completing the circle by "increasing in the knowledge of God." The Colossian Christians were messed up in the way they were living their lives because their thinking was messed up. Knowledge and behavior always go hand in hand. That's why Christian education is so important. When Christian teachers trade the teaching of the pure expression of God's Mind for the impure expression of the human mind, things in the Church can and do go terribly wrong.

Bishop J.B. Lightfoot wrote this in his work *Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* - "The Person of Christ is described first in relation more especially to Deity, and secondly, in relation more especially to created things. The fundamental conception of the Logos involves the idea of mediation between God and creation. A perverted view respecting the nature of the mediation between the two lay at the root of the heretical teaching at Colossae, and required to be met by the true doctrine of Christ as the Eternal Logos."

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“New Age” Thinking

I just searched for the words "new age" on Google and 777,000,000 results popped up. As often occurs, Wikipedia is the top result for searches. Here's what Wikipedia says about "new age."

"The New Age movement is a non-religious Western spiritual movement that developed in the latter half of the 20th century ... According to author Nevill Drury, the origins of the movement can be found in the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly through the works of the esotericists Emanuel Swedenborg, Franz Mesmer, Helena Blavatsky and George Gurdjieff, who laid some of the basic philosophical principles that would later influence the movement. It would gain further momentum in the 1960s, taking influence from metaphysics, self-help psychology, and the various Indian gurus who visited the West during that decade." Wikipedia

The "new age movement" is anything but new. In fact, it's thousands of years old. It has a strong religious history that had its birth in Eastern culture. It began with an ancient lie that has been repeated trillions of times since - "Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be

like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5) We learn the secret to Satan's power and influence in this one lie - and all the secrets of the so-called "new age movement."

21. "You will not surely die"
22. "your eyes will be opened"
23. "you will be like God"
24. "knowing good and evil"

People may believe they will experience hundreds of lifetimes in their effort to improve the standing of their soul. They may believe they are enlightened and have the spark of god within. They may claim to have the secret knowledge of the gods and be among the spiritual select. However, what they're doing is simply repeating a lie Satan told their most ancient ancestors.

The Apostle Paul and the young Church of the 1st Century were surrounded by "new age" thinking. Most of the Gentile believers of the early Church came out of the "new age movement" of their time. Whether it was the worship of Roman or Greek gods, the cult of imperial worship, the mystery religions, estrucan mythology, or gnosticism, the early Church was surrounded by it. The challenge Church leaders faced was that "new age" thinking did not dominate the minds and hearts of believers.

The Gnostic Threat

Gnosticism (from gnosis, the Greek word for knowledge) was part of Satan's lie - "your eyes will be opened, you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Gnostics believed they had "secret" knowledge and were the only ones able to impart that secret teaching to their followers. Gnosticism became a huge problem in the life of the Church in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries, but the philosophy was already well established around the Church in the 1st century. The news Epaphras brought the Apostle Paul about what was happening in the Colossian Church greatly concerned Paul, so he wrote a letter to the saints at Colossae that addressed their spiritual need, and in doing so, gave the Church God's Counsel on dealing with gnostic thought for generations to come.

Paul summed up the gnostic threat powerfully in the second chapter of his letter.

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." Colossians 2:8

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The word "cheat" in the Greek is *sulagogeō* and means "to carry off as spoil, to rob, to take captive." Paul knew that the "mind tricks" Satan was playing through gnosticism was extremely dangerous and could carry away Christians as his "spoil." How did Satan do it? Through "philosophy" (*philosophias*), empty deceit (*kenes apates*), according to the tradition of men (*paradosin ton anthropon*), according to the basic principles of the world (*stoicheia tou kosmou*), and not according to Christ. An important phrase Paul used three times in this sentence is "according to" (*kata*). The word *kata* means "down, down from, down upon, down against" and carries the idea of something being over, pushing down and holding down something else. Domination is a key to understanding Satan's tricks and the power of gnosticism in the early Church and its power today. Satan wants to dominate people. He does it easily, until a person becomes a Christian. Then Satan has to work harder to regain his former domination of the person's mind, will, desires, emotions, and beliefs.

Gnostics placed a great value on their experiences of *gnosis* in life - what they learned from their teachers, from angels and other mediating beings, from their study of the stars, and ancient alchemy. They believed that angels were involved with the Demiurge in creating the lower heavens and the earth. Paul addressed a similar issue in his letter to the Galatians, where they were facing opposition from gnostics and judaizers. Notice the emphasis on how angels from heaven might "pervert the

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gospel of Christ."

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:6-9

In Colossae, as in thousands of other cities around the world, Satan dominates through worldly philosophy (the love and pursuit of wisdom) and empty deceit (that which gives a false impression through deception), the traditions of men (teachings and beliefs handed down through generations by men) that are dominated by the basic principles of the world (living by the rules and orders of the world system), "and not according to Christ." The Apostle Paul has just given us our secret to fighting back against Satan - "according to Christ." The power of Christian thought is having our mind, will, desires, emotions, and beliefs covered and dominated by the Mind of Christ.

In the verses that follow, Paul made a full frontal assault on the dualistic beliefs of the gnostics. They believed they had secret knowledge about the nature of the universe and the origin and

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destiny of the human race. Gnostics claimed that the Supreme Being was remote and could not be known and that a powerful and evil and imperfect supernatural being called the Demiurge had created the world and was its dominant force. Plato put this idea forth in the 4th Century B.C., so it had developed into a strong belief system by the time of the founding of the Colossian Church.

Gnostics believed that a select group of individuals - including themselves and their chosen followers - had a divine spark within their material body and that through gnosis the spark could grow into a flame that would liberate them from the evil world created by Demiurge (knowledge of evil) and unite them with the Supreme Being (knowledge of good). Do you see Satan's original lie here? "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The gnostics taught that only they had the secrets of the knowledge of good and that anyone who did not know their secrets only had knowledge of evil. That was the same thing Satan told Eve when he tempted her to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan told her that if she ate of it, she would be "like God." That was the same message of the gnostics in the first few centuries of the Church. If people wanted to have the secret knowledge of good and evil, they would have to learn it from them.

The gnosticism that developed within the Church during the

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first few centuries taught that Jesus was a messenger from God who brought gnosis to believers on earth. They also taught that Jesus inhabited a human body only temporarily and denied His Death on the Cross and Resurrection from the grave. Gnostics also taught that Christians were divided into groups - spiritual and carnal. The spiritual believers were in the select group that had the divine spark within them that allowed them to be redeemed. Gnostics taught that only those with this special gnosis would be saved.

Paul took on the most important issue first - the Identity of Jesus Christ. If Jesus was who the gnostics said He was, then He did not die for the sins of the world, did not rise from the dead, and had no power to save souls and give them eternal life. Paul addressed that issue first because everything else was of little importance in comparison to whether Jesus Christ is Who He and His followers claimed Him to be.

"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in

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heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Colossians 1:16-20

Verse 16

"For" should be "because." "By him" is more correctly translated "in him" because it is locative of sphere rather than instrumental. Dr. Marvin Vincent in *Word Studies in the New Testament* wrote: "In Him, within the sphere of His personality, resides the Creative will and the Creative energy, and in that sphere the creative acts takes place. Thus creation is dependent on Him."

Things that "are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible." Paul is taking all of creation here: physical and spiritual, everywhere. Look back at Genesis Chapter 1 and you see God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Creating the heavens and the earth. "Whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers." Paul aims these words at the gnostic heresy. Dr. Vincent wrote: "The passage is aimed at the angel worship of the Colossians; showing that while they have been discussing the various grades of angels which fill the space between God and men, and depending on them as media of communion with God, they have degraded Christ who is above them all, and is the sole mediator."

Dr. Earl Ellis wrote: "Whatever cosmic powers there may be, they have nothing to offer or deny a Christian; in Christ he has all things." Jesus Created everything and everything was

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Created for Him. "All things were created through Him and for Him." Look around at what we call "nature" and you see everything Christ Created.

Verse 17

Christ is "before" all things. He is in front of, prior to, superior to all things. The gnostic heresy made Jesus lower or at the most only equal with other mediating powers. That teaching should seem ridiculous and absurd to Christians, but it was a teaching that divided the early Church for centuries.

"... and in Him all things consist." This means they "stand or are compacted together" in Him. Jesus is the Cosmic Glue Who holds everything together! Bishop Lightfoot wrote: "He is the principle of cohesion in the universe. He impresses upon creation that unity and solidarity which makes it a cosmos (an ordered system) instead of a chaos (an unformed mass). Thus (to take one instance) the action of gravitation, which keeps in their places things fixed and regulates the motions of things moving, is an expression of His mind."

How beautiful and powerful that truth is to a believer! Jesus Christ is not just one of many mediating beings who have access to God and can speak on our behalf - Jesus is the ONLY MEDIATOR between God and men. He is the One Who holds all things together.

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Verse 18

"And" connects the many truths about Christ that Paul is presenting to the Colossians. Just as Jesus is Lord and Sovereign of the physical creation, so He is Lord and Sovereign of the new spiritual creation, the Church - His Body - of which Christ is the Head. Jesus is also the "beginning" - the chief, the origin. He is "the firstborn from the dead." That refers to His resurrection from the dead. He is first in the physical creation which began at the beginning. He is also first in the spiritual creation which began at the resurrection. In all things Christ is first!

"that" speaks of purpose

"in all things" speaks of sphere

"He may have the preeminence" speaks of position (preeminence is "first in rank and influence")

Jesus is first in everything and should be acknowledged as such. He is Supreme!

Verse 19

"For" is "because" God was pleased to have all His Fullness dwell in Christ. God thought well of having His completeness housed permanently in Christ.

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The heretical teachers of Colossae used the term "fullness" in a technical sense to express the sum total of the divine powers and attributes. They believed that mediatory beings had some of God's powers, but in diluted form. They were only partial and blurred images. They ranked Christ with these inferior images of the divine. However, Paul wrote that Christ is the likeness of God and that all the divine powers and attributes were housed permanently in Him. "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9)

Verse 20

"reconcile" means "to change completely" ... "having made peace" means "binding together, harmonizing." How was this peace made? "through the blood of His cross."

The false teachers at Colossae aimed at affecting a partial reconciliation between God and man through the interposition of angelic mediators. The Apostle Paul spoke of an absolute and complete reconciliation of universal nature to God, affected through the mediation of the Incarnate Word. Jesus shed Divine Blood on the Cross-that brought peace to God and His relationship with sinful man (Hebrews chapters 9 & 10 have great insights into how the Blood of Christ made peace with God.)

Paul wrote the same thing to the Ephesian believers.

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the

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flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Ephesians 2:11-13

Application

We can apply Colossians 1:15-20 to our lives and practice in many ways:

1. Jesus Christ is the Only Way to God - trust Him alone for all Truth
2. Rejoice in the Power of Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of all things
3. Worship Christ alone - have no other gods before Him - He alone is worthy of our praise
4. Test all spiritual teaching with God's Word first. If it is false, put it away from you.
5. If you are in a position of leadership in your church, stand against any false teaching
6. In light of Who Jesus is, obey His every command
7. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength!

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False teaching and heresy surround Christians around the world today. Thousands of religious groups place Christ Jesus into a realm that is inferior to Who He really is. Paul's warning to Christians of the 1st Century A.D. is still true today in the 21st Century A.D. We must be wise and on our guard at all times.

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