

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

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COLOSSIANS 2:8-10

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power.”

The greatest discovery that any human being can make is the discovery of the all-sufficiency of Christ and the utter worthlessness of man without Him. Christ is all and in Him we have all. Without Him we are nothing, absolutely nothing. It makes no difference how many times we multiply ciphers: they will be devoid of all magnitude or quality until we place some digit before them. But once a digit is place before them, they take on meaning, value, and significance.

“Christ is all” is the covering principle of this Book of Colossians. Look at the following verses: “That in all things He might have the preeminence” (1:18); “In Him should all fulness dwell” (1:19); “In Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3); “In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (2:9); “In Him, which is the Head of all principality and power” (2:10); “Christ is all and in all” (3:11).

I am sure we all can sing with Charles Wesley, “Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all in Thee I find.”

Browning wrote: “I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ, accepted by that reason, solves for thee all questions in the earth and out of it, and has so far advanced thee to be wise.” And it was Bishop Moule who said: “No surer test according to Scripture can be applied to anything claiming to be Christian teaching. Where does it put Jesus Christ? What does it make of Jesus Christ? Is He something in it, or is He all?”

This Epistle of Colossians is a positive presentation of the antidote to every form of heresy. Epaphras had come to Paul at Rome with the news that real danger of false teaching had beset the church at Colosse. This new heresy called Gnosticism was a combination of Judaic Ritualism and Oriental Mysticism (See 2:16-18). These Colossians were asked to accept something in addition to Christ. They taught that Christ was not sufficient, not unique. They taught an additional philosophy (Vr.8), an additional astrology (Vr. 8 – “elements of the world” have to do with stars and planets), an additional circumcision (Vr.11); additional ascetic rules and regulations (Vs. 16, 20-23), and additional worship of angels (Vr. 18).

When anyone says that we are to be saved or kept by the Law, they have never understood the phrase: “Complete in Him”. “For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 10:4). When anyone suggests that we can add to our salvation by doing something, they have never understood the phrase, “Complete in Christ”. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). When anyone suggests that water baptism in any form is necessary for salvation, or as a testimony to one’s faith, or the door to the church, they do not understand the phrase, “Complete in Him”. For we are “Buried with Him in baptism” (Col. 2:12). When we are told that we must keep the Sabbath, we know men do not understand the completeness we have in Christ. “The sabbath days which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Col. 2:16-17).

The word translated “fulness” in 2:9 is in the Greek the word *pleroma*, and the word “complete” in 2:10 is the word *pepleromenoi*. This latter is a perfect passive participle of the word *pleroo*. The word means to “make full, to fill up, to fill to the full, to diffuse throughout, complete, nothing wanting”. So the great word in this Epistle, both with reference to Christ and to the believer in Christ is this word *pleroma* or *pleroo*. This fulness is worked into the very structure and language of the Epistle (See 1:9; 1:19; 1:24; 1:25; 2:2; 2:9; 2:10; 4:12; 4:17).

Not only in Colossians, but in the whole Bible we have tributes to Jesus Christ. He is seen in every promise, parable, prophecy, type, poem, narrative, allegory, and symbol. He is likened to the sun, the stars, the shepherd, the lamb, the lion, the door, the cornerstone, the foundation, the bread, and the wine. Everything about Him is superlative. He is the “Lord of Lords”, “the King of Kings”, “the fairest among ten thousand”.

Nothing can go beyond completeness. You can add nothing to it. You might as well try to purge a sunbeam, or purify the whiteness of the newly fallen snow as to add to that which is already perfect. And it is not only true that “all fulness dwells in Him”, but also that we are “complete in Him”.

One day Michelangelo went into the studio of the young painter Raphael, and finding him gone, left without leaving his name. But before he went, he took a piece of chalk and wrote on the canvas of the poor and meager design of Raphael a bold and sweeping line with the word “*amplius*” (wider). When Raphael returned and saw this, he knew immediately who had been there and done this. He thus changed his style. So our Lord points to his fulness and our narrowness and emptiness, and challenges us to partake of His fulness – His *pleroma*.

It is the privilege of every person to recognize their completeness in Christ. This can be done first:

BY RECOGNIZING CHRIST'S FULNESS

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (2:9).

Alford paraphrases this verse – “For in Him all the complete perfection essential to the Godhead abides corporeally, substantially, and really, and not in the manner of shadows”.

Christ's fulness is resident in His Person – (“in Him” – en auto). This phrase is given the emphatic position in the verse, and draws our attention first to the One Who has the fulness. The Holy Spirit wants us to see Him, even before we see His fulness. This is important.

We must also recognize the Permanence of this fulness in the word “dwelleth” (katoikei). This word means “to settle down, to be at home”. Deity is at home in Christ, and dwells so in a permanent way.

There is also the Plenitude of this fulness as seen in the words, “all the fulness of the Godhead” (pan to pleroma tes Theotetos). To make this matter exceedingly clear, the Apostle uses the word “pan” (all), emphasizing that the fulness is complete. There is no portion of the plenitude that is not present. Paul is pointing out further by the use of the word Theotetos (Godhead) that not the mere quality of God resides in Christ, as seen in Romans 1:20 by the use of the word Theiotes, but the absolute essence of God dwells in Christ. Christ is not merely like God, that is Divine, but He is Theos – God. This was Paul's declaration against the Gnostics before Athanasius had to oppose Arius (who said that the Son is not of the same substance as the Father, but was created as an agent for creating the world), or we, the modern cults of Theosophy, Baha'ism, Unity, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Mormons, etc.

In this fulness of Christ we also recognize the place in the word “bodily” – somatikos. This is an adverb modifying the verb “dwell”, pointing to the manner. It means “bodily” or “in bodily manifestation”. This does not mean a mystical dwelling, nor a mere spiritual dwelling, nor a limited bodily dwelling. It does mean an eternal bodily dwelling. There can be only one tenable explanation and that is, that Christ was and is God. All the fulness dwelt in Him before the incarnation, during the incarnation, and continues so permanently. Since “in Christ” the plenitude dwells permanently, and bodily, there is the manifestation that gives the lie to all forms of Gnosticism, which perverts the truth about the person of Christ. If the foregoing exposition is true, and it is, then certain things follow in logical sequence.

Christ is Head of all creation. “For by Him were all things created, ... all things were created by Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16-17). In creation Christ is preeminent. Every form and kind of matter, simple and complex were created by Him. The atom and the star, the sun and the cloud, every grade of life from the worm to the angel, every order of intellect and being around and above us, the splendors of Heaven and the nearer phenomena of the earth are the product of the first-born of all creation. Three

prepositions are used in relation to Christ as Creator – en, dia, and eis, - “in Him”, “through Him”, and “for Him”. Christ is the source, the means, and the end of all creation. He is also the conserver of all – “by Him all things consist” (Col. 1:17). He impresses upon creation its unity and solidarity, making it a cosmos instead of a chaos. He feeds the sun with fuel and the sparrow with corn. He guides the planets in their courses, and keeps the heart beating in man. He cares for the tiniest insect that makes the coral and the mightiest leviathan which plows the deep. He guides the seraph and the cherub in their inter-special missions. The helm of the universe is in His hands that were nailed to Calvary for you and me. Everywhere we behold His footprints; out of every storm and solitude we hear His voice across the darkness saying: “It is I, be not afraid.”

Christ is also the Head of all redemption. “And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself” (Col. 1:20). He is both the “Author and Finisher” of our faith; the “Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End” of our redemption. When He cried, “It is finished” it was finished. Nothing was left undone, and nothing need be added. In the incarnation He became both God and man; in the crucifixion He became our means of peace and provision for every spiritual blessing; in the resurrection He became our power over death, the grave, and Lake of Fire; in His ascension and seating at God’s right hand, He became our guarantee of all future glory with Him. Nothing has been left undone for our future glorification with Him “in the Heavenlies”.

Christ is the Head of the Church, His Body. “And He is the Head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). The head is the glory of the body. There the chief beauty of manhood dwells. Christ is fairer than all. We are circumcised with Him, baptized with Him, risen with Him, ascended with Him, and seated with Him in glory. What a complete identification! It is the head which unifies the body, coordinates all its movements, and regulates all its actions. From the head comes the mandate which lifts the hand and moves the foot.

Christ is again the Head of our hope. “When Christ Who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col.3:4). Christ takes care of all our sorrows, sufferings, trials and tribulations. Matthew Arnold shows the failure of the Greek religion to take into account the sorrows of life. It was only a fair weather religion. Twenty miners were once buried in a coal pit in Wales, standing in water to the waist, until but five remained. Yet they were singing: “In the deep and mighty waters there is none to hold my head, But my only Savior Jesus, Who was offered in my stead”. The South Sea Islanders have a palm tree that they use for bread, drink, clothing, shelter, light, material for books, cordage for boats, and for needles. So our Lord Jesus Christ is all and in all. We are God’s heavenly people; our citizenship is in Heaven, and from thence we look for our Savior. “Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

The “fulness” of Christ is but half of the story. The apostle hastens on to show the other side. So we must also,

RECOGNIZE THE CHRISTIAN'S FULNESS

“Ye are complete in Him” (2:10). Note our present possession in the words “ye are”. This word in the Greek holds the emphatic position. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God” (1 Jn. 3:2). Note also our present position – “in Him”. Again the Greek gives this an emphatic location. “In Him” is the richest little phrase in all of Paul’s Epistles. This is the sphere of the believer’s life. It is a sphere, not a mere circle. We are “in Him” surrounded above, beneath, beside, and all around. So nothing can come from without to harm us, and with Him within we should be “more than conquerors”. “In Him” we have all that He has, and he is our fulness, our complement, our completeness. See also our past perfection as believers. The word is *pepleromenoi*, and means “complete, filled full, perfected”. This is a perfect, passive participle, so it represents a past perfect work. Demosthenes used the word here translated “complete” in describing a ship fully manned. Truly our ship is fully manned, from prow to stern, by her Captain Who steers the vessel, stills the storm, guides through rocks and reefs, feeds the crew, fills every need, and brings the vessel to its desired haven.

If we are “complete in Him” and we are “by grace though faith” then it follows what Paul sets forth in the Epistle.

We are complete without philosophy. “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments (elements) of the world, and not after Christ” (2:8). We need no sophisms of this world to prop our faith. There is nothing new in philosophy except old error. One day three friend philosophers came to Job to comfort him and to set him straight as to his thinking. These three represent the reasoning’s of the best of men. Eliphaz reasons on human experience (4:8; 5:3; 15:17) – “Even as I have seen”, “I have seen”. It is what he had seen, heard, and felt. Bildad comes with human tradition (8:8,10) – “For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age”, “search of the fathers”. Zophar reasons on human merit (11:13-14) – “If thou prepare thine heart”. This is the gospel of humanism. Six thousand years of human groping after wisdom have not given men the true knowledge of God, nor His ways with man. Man’s reason is inadequate to understand either the will or way of God. If man by his own reason could find God, and His way of redemption, then there would be no need of a revelation. Like little David we are content with the sling and the stones. As for the armor of philosophy, we leave that to proud Goliath to wear. “Spoil you” says Paul. The word is *sulagōgon*, and means “to carry off as a captive, a slave, as booty”. It is used of kidnapping and plundering a house, also seducing a maiden.

We are also “complete in Him” without ceremonies. “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days” (2:14,16-17).

All these ceremonies had their day. They belong to the time of shadows; we now have the Substance, Christ. "Finished are the types and shadows of the ceremonial law." Circumcision, sacrifices, Passover, water baptism, temple services, priestly functions, etc. etc. are but "beggarly elements" of a past age, encumbrances no longer needed. Who looks for the moon as long as the sun is shining? We are in the day of the Substance, not in the night of the shadows. But man is so prone to be religious, and add something to Christ. He must "touch" and "taste" and "handle" something

Again, we are "Complete in Him" without any human merit. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). All our righteousnesses are but filthy rags. If we were "dead in sins" and we were, how could a dead man do anything? He cannot see, hear, touch, smell, speak, or walk. So how utterly foolish it is like Zophar to talk about preparing one's heart to appease God or to merit His favor.

Therefore if "in Him" there dwells all "the fulness of the Godhead bodily" and we are "complete in Him" let us live as those who know this fulness! The Pauline doctrine of Christ is His absolute "fulness", His pleroma. And the doctrine of the members of His body is the doctrine of "ye are complete in Him". Christ should therefore command all our worship, our admiration, our love. There is at our disposal the infinite merit of his righteousness; the infinite efficacy in His blood; and the infinite power of his resurrection and glorification.

The celebrated artist Danneker was asked by Napoleon to paint Venus for the Louvre, and declined. An enormous sum was offered him, but still he declined. The little emperor angrily demanded the reason. "I have just painted Christ" was the answer "and I can never lower my brush to paint such as inferior subject as Venus."

Let us therefore sing:

"Now blest in heavenly places in Christ at God's right hand;
And filled with all His fulness complete in Him to stand.
Sing to the praise and glory of Him Who thus hath shown;
Such gracious love and mercy to call us for his own."

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