

The Fullness of Christ

Colossians 2:6-15

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Live in Christ because He is the all supreme, all sufficient complete Savior. That's Paul's main point in our text today. We are to live after the pattern of Christ's life because of who He is and what He has done for us. Paul was helping the Colossians deal with basic human needs that false teachers were playing on. Emptiness, guilt and fear plague most of us at one time or another. We long for fulfillment, forgiveness and security. Our need to fill our emptiness, deal with our guilt and overcome our fears can drive us to look somewhere other than Christ. The Colossians were in danger. Paul warns them. We too need his warning and his reassurance. Paul helps the Colossians recognize who Christ really is and what He has done for them. A fresh appreciation for Christ's fullness gives fresh motivation to live for Him knowing He is our all supreme, all-sufficient, complete savior. He fills our emptiness, forgives our guilt and conquers our fears.

We can so easily reach out in other directions for help with life. Somehow we think it must be easier than this. Life should not be this hard. We try to deal with our guilt, drown it, excuse it, minimize it, ignore it, or make up for it. We chase fulfillment. Marketers know this, so every product, service and seminar offers us the good life, fulfillment and happiness. And yet this is what Jesus offers. Is He not enough? In the religious world, to find true fulfillment or real connection with God, people add to Christ more rules to the Bible, additional rituals, and following God's plan for eating. They chase after new teachings that promise to unlock the secrets of just about anything. At times we wonder why bad things are happening to us. In the hit TV show, *My Name is Earl*, the main character assumes bad things keep happening to him because of Karma, so he makes a list of every bad thing he has done to make up for it. He is trying to deal with his fear, overcome his guilt and find fulfillment.

The answers to an empty life, a guilt conscience and a fearful mind are found in the Book. Open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2, verse 6. Christ is the theme once again. Paul's point is that we should live in Christ because He is the all supreme, all-sufficient complete Savior. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. Colossians 2:6-15 (NIV)

⁶ *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,* ⁷ *rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and*

overflowing with thankfulness. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. ⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Since Christ Jesus has done so much for us as our complete savior, we should live in Him, the all supreme, all sufficient One. Paul gives his main command in verse six and then says what we are not to do in verse 8. In verses 9-10 He summarizes the message of the book: Christ is supreme over all and totally sufficient for our lives and then in verses 11-15 he pictures all Christ has done to save us.

Notice how He describes our King with three powerful names: Christ, Jesus, the Lord. “Christ” reminds us that He is the Messiah, the anointed one who is also “Jesus,” a historical, human person. Christ Jesus is “the Lord,” a term that recalls all Paul has taught about Him so far in Colossians. Christ the Lord is God, the Creator of all, the firstborn, the beginning, the head of all that is. He is the Lord. And so we could live consistent with His lordship.

Live in Christ (as you received Jesus, the Lord)

What does it mean to *live in Christ*? The New International Version says *continue to live in Him*. This translation correctly conveys the tense of the verb. Paul echoes back to his prayer in chapter 1 verse 10 that we would *live a life worthy of the Lord*. We should live in union with Christ, a life patterned after His. His point is not just existence, but how we conduct our lives. We should live every aspect of our lives in Christ, as Christ and for Christ.

Paul amplifies his command with four participles giving four forceful metaphors. We are to live in Christ being well rooted like a tree, solidly built like a house, confirmed and settled like a legal document, and overflowing like a jug full of wine. We are to be

Rooted, built up, strengthened, thankful

We were rooted once for all when we were planted in Christ at our conversion. Then we are to grow in Christ, to be built up in our walk with God. We are to be strengthened in the faith as we were taught. Christianity has content. It is not just feelings or rituals, but solid truth that we need to learn more and more.

Finally, the first three: rooted, built up and established should lead to: overflowing with thanksgiving. We are to overflow with gratitude. A grateful heart for all God has given us in Christ will strengthen our grip on the truth. Paul again echoes his prayer from chapter one that we would be joyfully giving thanks. Gratitude to God should be a primary characteristic of mature Christ-followers. A thankless spirit betrays a life no longer focusing on the greatness of Christ. It is looking down, not up.

Positively, Paul calls us to live in Christ in light of the fact that He is Jesus the Lord. Negatively, he warns us to constant watchfulness because danger is near. Be careful not to be taken captive by “philosophy.”

Careful not be taken captive by “philosophy”

To be taken captive is a vivid image. It is to be kidnapped, exploited, or stolen. The picture is of slave traders carrying off their victims. This practice existed back then as it does today in the global sex trade. I don’t want you to be taken captive today by hollow and deceptive philosophy.

Notice philosophy itself is not the problem, but teaching that is “empty” meaning without content, truth or power and “Deceptive” meaning “a deceit, fraud, or trick.” This teaching in Colosse claimed to offer something more than Christ, but actually it was empty in contrast with Christ in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is the One who gives us fullness. Alternatives and additions are empty and deceitful.

This teaching may have been compelling because it came from human traditions, perhaps ancient ideas. People will believe something simply

because it is old, but that does not make it true or helpful. People get fascinated with ancient secret texts that supposedly offer deep wisdom for life. Do not be fooled.

The content of the false teaching involved elemental forces of the world. The Greek phrase here is “according to the elements of the world.” The NIV translates it “basic principles,” but along with most modern commentators I believe Paul is referring to elemental forces, not just ideas. All over the world through history, humans have tried to deal with elemental forces: forces of nature, the power of the stars in astrology, the power genetics, the power of evil spirits, the power of magic, and the power of fate or luck. A poll conducted a few years ago reports that 48 percent of Americans believe that astrology is “probably” or “definitely” valid. Whether we are dealing with illness, business or love, we look for ways to find success by manipulating or appeasing elemental forces.

I received an email from friend’s wife about her ex-husband (I’ve changed the names): “Mark (the dad) told Billy (his son) that there is an evil spirit that lives at his house and Mark sees it daily. It has a face like a muskrat and huge wings. He also told Billy that he was thinking about getting a Catholic Priest to ‘bless’ the house to try and get rid of this.” Mary Daly, a feminist writer calls for women to tap into their elemental potency, to reclaim their “capacity to receive inspiration, truth from the elements of the natural world.” Mother Earth worship is alive and well. Fear drives people to consult astrologers, palm readers, Tarot cards, channelers, and psychics, and try to commune with ancient spirits, purify their auras with crystals, or make pilgrimages to sites of harmonic convergence such as Sedona to get in sync with powerful earth forces.

What are your fears? How are you trying to address them? There is a black piece of paper in your program. You can write on it your fears. Later we will have the opportunity to symbolically give them to God.

Be on your guard. The danger is real. The pull is strong. This kind of empty, deceptive teaching creates a climate of fear, heightens a sense of helplessness and tries to take over the role of the Lord. The most important and damning feature of this so-called philosophy is that it is not of Christ. Christ is neither its source nor its substance. It is precisely the failure of such speculations to grasp the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ our Savior that demonstrates their emptiness and deceitfulness.

Paul says I have a simple point to make: Live in Christ without becoming captive to empty teaching. Now let me remind you of just who Christ is and what He has done. Verses 11 to 15 give an amazing, beautiful set of pictures that I hope stimulate your mind and ignite your soul. We should overflow with thanksgiving in light of what He has done. We live in Christ because Christ is supreme, sufficient and savior.

Because Christ is supreme, sufficient and savior

The real key to life; the real answer to emptiness, guilt and fear is Christ Jesus the Lord. When you understand fully who He is and what He has done, you realize He is more than enough. Verse 9 is the rock upon which all attempts to disprove Christ's deity are shattered.

Christ is fully supreme in deity, bodily

Paul writes, ⁹ *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form*, Christ is fully supreme in deity, bodily. All the fullness means no aspect of God-ness is left out. He is fully God. In other words, Christ Jesus the Lord is not just a divine being, not just a high angel, not a demi-god, not one god among many, not merely a powerful force. He is uniquely fully God. He is fully God bodily. At the incarnation Christ took on humanity and now He continues to exist bodily. His incarnation is permanent. Christ is supreme in deity, bodily. And this same Christ, verse 10 tells us

Christ is fully sufficient for you *and you have been given fullness in Christ.* The same word for "fullness" is used here. The One who is fully God has given you all fullness in Him. We do not follow some empty philosophy, but we are filled with the fullness of Christ. You want a fulfilled life. What you will not find in the empty claims of marketers and hucksters, you will find in Christ Jesus the Lord. He fully satisfies. He offers us all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

We need look nowhere else. In Christ we can live life to the fullest. John said Jesus came to give us life to the full (John 10:10). You will not find genuine personal fulfillment outside of Jesus Christ like what He can offer you. Any thought of seeking higher or more fulfilling experiences is delusional. Quit running from seminar to seminar and book to book. Jesus has the answers to life. He will give you fulfillment. Christians, quit running

to the newest teaching or spiritual fad, Jesus is as deep as it gets. God provides fullness in Him, the full satisfaction of every spiritual need. “Thou, O Christ, are all I want, More than all in Thee I find.”

But Christians are often pestered by some group within or without the church who allege that they fall short in some area necessary for salvation. Religious groups add baptism, good works, sacraments, financial giving, or following rules. Paul says let me tell you the truth. Not only is Christ all supreme and all sufficient, but Christ saved you completely.

Christ saved you completely

Paul is writing this mainly to believers to remind them of what Christ has done for them. After being Christians for a while we can drift away from really grasping what Jesus has done for us, so we can be seduced into thinking we must do something extra to win God’s favor. A fresh grasp of what Jesus has done gives fresh motivation to live for Christ. For those of you who have not yet chosen to follow Christ, listen to what God offers you through Christ. Consider bowing your knee to Christ. You have so much to gain. At the end of the service, I will offer you an opportunity to trust in Christ to save you.

By a sequence of vivid metaphors Paul displays the full scope of what Christ accomplished for us. He has saved us completely. There is nothing we could add. Pray God will help you freshly grasp the significance of what Christ has done for you.

You were “circumcised” in Christ through Christ’s “circumcision”

This first metaphor is the most challenging to understand. Circumcision on a physical level is cutting off flesh on males which was the identifying mark of Jewish men. In the Old Testament the prophets talked about the need for a circumcision of the heart, not just the flesh.

The Greek text here is difficult. The NIV has chosen an interpretation by their translation of the key phrase in verse 11, literally in Greek, “in the stripping off of the body of flesh.” They translate: “in the putting off of the sinful nature.” The issue here is who is circumcised? Christians or Christ? While the NIV view has merit, I believe the better view is that “the body of flesh” refers not to our sinful nature, but to Christ’s physical body. The same

phrase is used in chapter 1 verse 22 where it clearly means Christ's physical body.

In what is frankly a graphic metaphor for the crucifixion, Paul shows us that Christ's circumcision involved not just the stripping away of a small piece of flesh, but the violent removal of His entire body in death. When Christ's body was circumcised from Him in His death on the Cross, we were circumcised with Him. In other words we share in His death. Our death with Christ is depicted in baptism, the next image. Paul summarizes the gospel as the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In verse 12 we see that

You were buried and raised with Christ through your faith

Baptism gives a powerful picture of sinking below the water with Christ in a kind of burial. When we go under the water we are identifying with Christ in His death. Baptism is not necessary for salvation; it pictures salvation. At our salvation we are united with Christ. And then when we come out of the water that pictures our resurrection with Christ. We are united with Him in His death and resurrection.

But we are only so united if we have exercised faith in God's resurrection power. You can experience the fullness that Christ offers you by trusting in Jesus Christ as your savior. There is no other way. It is just that simple and just that powerful. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal savior? If you have any doubt, make sure today. Pull out that Care Card in your Program. Look at the box that says, "I have trusted in Christ today." If you have never done so, I hope today is your day. I want you to experience the fullness, forgiveness and security that Christ has to offer you. I will pray with you at the end of the service.

In verse 13, Paul gives the next powerful picture: death to life.

God made you alive with Christ

¹³ *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. "Dead" means that you were disconnected from God, separated. "In the uncircumcision of your sinful flesh" can be a metaphor of spiritual, heart-rebellion. Ironically to move from death to life, you need to die with Christ, so you can rise with Him. God is the Life-giver. He gives you life in Christ, full life. What did God do*

to make you alive in Christ? Paul now gives three more, powerful pictures to show how God made us alive in Christ. If what he had already shared what not wonderful enough, He says God makes you alive by forgiving all your sin.

By forgiving all your sin

The word for “forgiven” comes from the same word as “grace.” God graciously forgives us in His incredible mercy. He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west. He chooses to remember them no more.

Notice a three-letter important word, “all.” In Christ, God forgives all your sins. All your sins. Not just the little ones or the respectable ones or the ones you only did once, but all your sins, including the worst ones, the ones you did over and over. All. None are left out. And that’s not all. God makes you alive in Christ by

By removing the written accusation against us through nailing it to the cross

The “*written code with its regulations*” is not the Mosaic law, but more generally pictures a signed certificate of debt in which the signature legalized the debt. It is a document of condemnation, a record of sins. The vivid verb “canceled” means to wipe it out, remove it, obliterate it like erasing an entry in a book; our sins have been wiped off the hard drive, not a trace remains. Christ took away what was opposed to us by nailing it to the cross. Jesus paid our full debt on the cross and then tore up the note against us. J. B. Phillips’s translation catches the idea: “Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over His own head on the cross.”

I read that Martin Luther experienced the reality of this truth in a dream in which he was visited at night by Satan, who brought to him a record of his own life,.....The Tempter said to him, “Is that true, did you write it?” The poor terrified Luther had to confess it was all true. Scroll after scroll was unrolled, and the same confession was wrung from him again and again.....The Evil One prepared to take his departure, having brought Luther down to the lowest depths of abject misery. Suddenly the Reformer turned

to the Tempter and said: “It is true, every word of it, but write across it all: “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.”

Take the black paper in your program and write down sins for which you feel guilty in addition to fears, then at the end of the service we will symbolically put them at the cross giving them to God who forgives all our sin, fills our emptiness and conquers our fears.

Believers are totally forgiven in Christ. He has removed the accusation against us, nailing it to the cross. And that’s not all. There is one more. God has made us alive in Christ by

By stripping the rulers and powers through public triumph in Christ

The final metaphor describing Christ’s complete salvation shifts from the power of the cross to destroy our debt to the power of the cross over evil powers. The word the NIV translates “disarmed” is literally “stripped,” the same word used in verse 11 of Christ’s body of flesh. These powers, angry at Christ, stripped Him naked, held him up on the cross and celebrated a triumph over him; but, but, but Christ Jesus the Lord declares that, on that cross God was stripping them naked, holding them up to public contempt, and leading them in his own victory parade.

You have no need to fear or appease elemental forces. God has stripped all the powers and authorities of their potency, importance, and anything else that would lead humans to honor or fear them.

The rulers put Christ to death without knowing that through His death He would conquer them.

The image is of a victorious general leading his army with his defeated enemies in his parade. Paul may have chosen this picture in direct contrast with the false teachers who want to take the Colossians captive to elemental forces. On the contrary the evil powers are Christ’s prize of war. Unseen forces do not need to be feared or appeased. A much greater power rules them all.

Those powers who thought they had Christ nailed by the hands and feet to the shameful wood are now held in His hands stripped of their power as He

stands to show the universe their helplessness and His own unvanquished power.

There may be monsters in your life. Perhaps you are haunted by your own personal demons, subliminal horrors. They are destroyed by Christ. He is the creator and ruler of all powers and forces. None stands against Him. Write your fears on that black paper, whatever they may be. Give them to Christ. He conquers them all. In Christ Jesus the Lord you find not only fulfillment and forgiveness but true security in the One who is Supreme over every power.

We are to live in Christ because in Him the powers are defeated. In Him the debt is wiped out, In Him we have forgiveness of all our sins. In Him we are made alive. In Him we are dead, buried and raised. In Him alone is all the fullness of deity, bodily. And in Him we have fullness.

Christ Jesus the Lord offers you fulfillment, forgiveness and security. Live in Him because He is all supreme, and all sufficient as our complete Savior.

Prayer of salvation

“Dear God, I believe Jesus is supreme. He is God. I trust in Jesus Christ alone to save me. Thank you Jesus for forgiving me and giving me life. In Jesus Name, Amen.”

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