

## THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST Colossians 2:6–15

***“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,  
and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.” (vs. 9–10a)***

What makes for a full life? In today’s world, there are many competing worldviews and temptations that promise to satisfy physically, intellectually, and emotionally. They offer fullness but cannot truly fill. Fun, riches, fame, popularity, influence, prestigious degrees, relational intimacy: the fullness from these things cannot lastingly satisfy the desires of our souls. Even a leading a fruitful ministry does not produce fullness. In our flesh, we are easily tempted and led astray. But when we find fullness in the riches of Christ, we can avoid being deceived by the allurements of this world. In this passage, Paul proclaims the fullness of Christ as the solution to competing philosophies and worldly affections.

The Colossians had accepted as true the apostolic teaching that Jesus is Lord. Now, they needed to live like it. If they felt like something was lacking in their spiritual life, it wasn't because of any lack in Christ. They didn't need extra philosophies to add to Christ. Rather, they needed to go deeper in what they already had in Christ. For in him is fullness, and they had already been brought to fullness. After asserting Christ’s fullness, Paul displays to them Christ's fullness through reminding them of the gospel. Let’s learn from Paul about the fullness of Christ and how we can experience fullness in Christ.

### **I. Live Your Lives in Christ (vs. 6–8)**

Colossae was a city with many religious views, including numerous philosophers advocating different systems of belief. The Colossian Christians were being presented with a veritable buffet of different philosophies and religious systems apart from Christ. These competing philosophies did not oppose Christ directly. Rather, they purported to offer some additional benefits to following Christ or attempted to assimilate Christ into their preexisting worldviews. Jewish legalism (2:16–17) said, “Depend on Christ *and* keep dietary laws and festivals.” Angel worshippers (2:18–19) said, “Worship Christ *and* many angels!” Ascetics (2:20–23) said, “Obey Christ *and* practice harsh self-denial.” They all thought that Christ was merely one of many valid ways. They thought Christ alone was not enough to satisfy. Paul wanted to guard the Colossians against un-Christian worldviews through teaching them about fullness in Christ.

Paul knew they were disciplined and firmly believed in Christ (2:5), but mere discipline and doctrinal knowledge were insufficient. How could the Colossians experience fullness in Christ that guards their hearts against fine-sounding arguments?

It would not be by adding additional religious traditions and philosophies to what they had already in Christ. Rather, it would be through fuller experience of Christ, through deeper knowledge of Christ. *That’s* where the full riches are—all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:2–3)! Look at verse 6: ***“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.”*** The Greek word used for “received” was a technical term Paul often used for receiving apostolic tradition, including the gospel<sup>1</sup>. The Colossians had accepted as true the gospel teaching they had heard that Jesus Christ is Lord, which Paul reminded them of in chapter 1. Jesus is the unique Son of God, the agent of creation, the sustainer of the universe; he is supreme, exalted, and sovereign over every other. Jesus is the only way of salvation the only way to the Father—not just one of many ways. Yet at the same time, salvation is not the finish line. Rather, it is the starting line for the race of faith.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Paul’s use of παραλαβανω (*paralambano*) in 1Co 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal 1:12; Php 4:9; 1Th 2:13; 4:1; 2Th 3:6.

Paul gives some ways that Christians can live our lives in Christ in verse 7: ***“rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”*** First, rooted and built up in him. Being rooted and built up implies stability and connection. And roots have the additional connotation of receiving sustenance and nourishment. We can receive nourishment and edification from Christ as we meditate on his words which we were taught and delight in them (Ps 1:2–3). To take root in Christ also means to commit fully to him (Mk 4:16–17). We cannot see the roots of a plant. Likewise the depth of one’s commitment to Jesus is not apparent on the surface. But eventually it will become the source of a fruit-bearing life. The deepening of roots is a slow and steady process. Sometimes it is not easy for roots to keep going deeper. But over many years, tree roots can break through concrete. Deep roots in Christ are necessary to bear fruit.

Second, strengthened in the faith as you were taught. For a muscle to be strengthened, it must be exercised. Jesus taught in Matthew 7:24 that being firmly built up requires not only listening to his words but putting them into practice: *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”* We can be strengthened in faith by living by faith in obedience to Jesus’ teaching. One recent graduate in our ministry experienced such strengthening of his faith last month. When he hurt his back such that he could only lie on the ground in pain, he remembered Psalm 16, which we’d studied for Thanksgiving. He thought about how David was comforted by the fact that God was always with him and received comfort from God. He told me afterward, “I thought of [Psalm 16,] and it was the most comforting 15 minutes of excruciating pain I ever went through.” He experienced practically that God’s word is dependable and true.

Third, overflowing with thankfulness. The theme of gratitude runs through the book of Colossians, appearing in each of the four chapters<sup>2</sup>. Paul saw thankfulness as a key strategy to defend against false teaching. If the Colossians were thankful for what they had, they wouldn’t be quick to embrace alien doctrines. When we start thinking about the things of this world that we don’t have, or the hardships we are experiencing, it’s natural to become ungrateful and complaining. Such a grumbling mindset easily influences the people around us, and it leads to other sins (Rom 1:21). But when we remember everything we have in Christ and all that God has done for us in Christ, then we can overflow with thankfulness in any earthly situation. Paul goes on later in this passage to remind us who Christ is and what he has done for us, so we can overflow with thankfulness.

Thankfulness makes a huge difference in the Christian life. Our Christmas worship service featured Philippians 2:1–12, where Christ made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. Since then, I’ve been praying each day for God to give me opportunities to serve like Jesus. Asking God for this has helped me to give thanks when tempted to grumble. Last month, my wife’s car was towed while she was at work, so I had to borrow my parents-in-law’s car to pick her up from work and drive together to the impoundment lot. I intentionally thanked God for the opportunity to serve my wife. A few weeks later, she had to leave for work before dawn, and it had snowed over night and was 0°F outside. So again, I thanked God for the opportunity to serve, then cleared and warmed up the car. Though my mask was getting stiff from the cold, my heart was warm with thanks to God.

Paul gives another instruction for living under Christ’s lordship in verse 8: ***“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.”*** Faithfulness to Christ demands rejection of competing philosophies. The doctrines espoused by the false teachers in Colossae were not innocuous fancies; they threatened to take the Colossian believers captive, like a kidnapper. These philosophies had

---

<sup>2</sup> See Col 1:12; 3:15–17; 4:2.

numerous problems that Paul pointed out. They were hollow—appearing impressive but lacking any true substance, worth, or usefulness. They were also deceptive—leading people away from the truth into fine-sounding lies. They depended on merely human tradition for their informational content and authority, as well as on the elemental spiritual forces of this world. It is unclear precisely which spiritual forces Paul meant—perhaps the same as the powers and authorities over which Christ is head (2:10b). But the point is clear that the spiritual forces of this world are unreliable. The worst problem of these philosophies was that they didn't depend on Christ, who alone is Savior and supreme Lord.

Let us heed Paul's warning against hollow and deceptive philosophies, which abound today, taking many people captive. Like in Paul's day, many people today advocate Christ *plus* something: Christ plus social justice. Christ plus psychology. Christ plus socialism. Christ plus astrology. Christ plus Buddha. But anything that purports to add to Christ actually subtracts from Christ. One student I met this past semester had been raised Christian, became an atheist, then converted to Buddhism. He claimed to believe Jesus and the Bible, but he wouldn't accept biblical truth that he didn't agree with. By adding to Jesus, he couldn't receive Jesus as his Lord.

## II. The Fullness of Christ (vs. 9–15)

Paul continues his argument by explaining why the competing philosophies' failure to depend on Christ is such a big problem. Verse 9 says, "***For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.***" The fullness of the deity includes every power and glory of God—God's omnipotence and holiness and wisdom and omniscience and righteousness, justice, love, majesty, beauty—all God's fullness is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. During his earthly ministry, Jesus revealed his divine power by walking on water, commanding the storm to cease, healing blind eyes, raising the dead, and countless other mighty deeds. Jesus manifested his divine wisdom by refuting all the trick questions whereby the religious experts sought to trap him. Jesus displayed his divine glory on the mountain of transfiguration, shining brighter than the sun to give three privileged disciples a foretaste of the glory Jesus will one day share with all who believe in him. In him is fullness of deity; apart from him is no way to God. Any belief system that misses or misidentifies Christ misses everything, no matter what else it might get right. A worldview not centered on Christ is fatally deficient.

Paul gives another reason to reject such philosophies in verse 10a: "***and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.*** ..." In Christ, believers lack nothing (Ps 23:1). Christ brings fullness for his people. He satisfies our spiritual hunger, providing everything our souls need—meaning, comfort, joy, security, hope. In John 6:35, "...*Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'*" There is no more need to seek significance and satisfaction from the things of this world. And for those whose eyes are opened to the fullness of Christ, neither is there desire to do so. Such can recognize the world's attractions and treasures as stagnant, muddy well water next to the flowing, clear living water from the spring of Christ (Jn 4:13–14).

Now, it is one thing to claim that Christ satisfies our souls with, for example, meaning, comfort, joy, security, and hope, but *how* does he do so? Christ provides *meaning* for our lives by calling and empowering us with his Spirit to take part in his eternally meaningful work of world salvation. Christ provides *comfort* in our pain and sorrow, empathizing with our weakness and promising his presence. He brings the weary and burdened rest for their souls (Mt 11:28–30). Christ provides *joy* through his great love shown by dying for us on the cross and his promises of heavenly rewards and of inheriting with him an eternal kingdom, whence also our eternal security and *hope*. Christ provides our *self-worth* by giving us identity as holy and beloved children of God. In Christ we are brought to fullness.

However, such utter fullness is not always our experience. Paul spoke about the Colossian believers positionally as having been brought to fullness. However, Paul knew that they weren't yet experiencing the full measure of fullness, as demonstrated by the heresies plaguing the Colossian church. Thus, Paul prayed hard and worked hard for their filling—specifically with knowledge of God's will (Col 1:9), with the word of God (Col 1:25), and with complete understanding of Christ (Col 2:2). The more they could gain personal knowledge of God, his will, and his Son, the more they would experience the fullness of Christ and treasure Christ above all.

Paul prayed similarly for the Ephesian Christians in Ephesians 3:19, saying, *“and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”* The love of Christ surpasses apprehension by mere doctrinal knowledge. But Paul prayed with confidence based on God's power that they could know Christ's love experientially. Then, they could be filled with all God's fullness.

One time I remember experiencing Christ's love was September 22, 2014—about three months after my marriage to Rebekah. She and I were on campus reaching out to students, and we both got ticketed for crossing a street without waiting for the light. Together, the tickets ended up being \$199. We were discouraged about the expense, but continued our outreach. Then, the next day, we got a check in the mail. It was a very belated wedding gift: \$200 from someone we didn't even know. And it's not like we'd been receiving a steady stream of gifts either! I knew it wasn't mere coincidence, but God was watching and pleased with our service to him (though maybe not our jaywalking). I believe that as we each serve God, even though we may face hardships and discouragements, we can deeply experience his presence and love.

The greatest way to experience Christ's love is to remember the greatest act of love, which he did for us. Paul goes on to describe what Christ did to save us, reminding of his death and resurrection, his victory. In doing so, Paul is commending to the Colossians a view of Christ as supremely admirable and desirable. The fullness of Jesus' divine love and might are revealed most powerfully of all in the gospel of Jesus' death to conquer his foes and his resurrection to save his friends. In light of the wonderful salvation that Christ achieved at so great personal cost, the competing philosophies are exposed as hollow. So, like a jeweler holding a diamond in the light to show the beauty of all its facets, Paul uses several metaphors to illuminate different facets of glorious gospel truth, such as circumcision, baptism, a courtroom, and a victory parade.

Paul begins by describing conversion with terminology of circumcision in verse 11: ***“In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ.”*** Paul is using the imagery of spiritual circumcision to describe repentance as something that God mercifully grants (2Ti 2:25). Just as a Jewish baby boy could take no credit for his circumcision, neither can born-again Christians take any credit for our repentance. It was not done by human hands but by the divine working of Christ. And what was put off was not just a bit of flesh. It was our whole self ruled by the flesh—our old, selfish, worldly way of living. This spiritual reality of having our whole self ruled by the flesh put off is the grounds for Paul's practical exhortations to holy living in Colossians 3:5–9.

Paul pivots to the language of baptism in verse 12: ***“having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”*** Using similar imagery to Romans 6:2–5, Paul explains that the believer died and was buried with Christ, which is symbolized by going under the water in baptism. Then, through faith in God and in Jesus' resurrection, the believer is raised with Christ to live a new life, symbolized by coming back out of the

water. The reality of our new resurrected life helps us live with a resurrected mindset, setting our minds on things above (Col 3:1–3).

Paul continues his account of what God did for us in verse 13a: “***When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. . .***” Part of appreciating what Christ did for us is remembering how dire, how hopeless, our previous condition was. We were as powerless to save ourselves as a corpse is to live. But in an act of sheer grace, God exerted the same divine power that raised Christ from the dead in order to give us new life (Eph 1:19–20).

Paul transitions to a courtroom scene in 13b–14: “***...He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.***” God is the righteous Judge of all creation, who cannot overlook one sin without compromising his perfect holiness. That is initially bad news for us, since each of our sins has been recorded: Selfish! Proud! Blasphemer! Idolater! Thief! Coward! Murderer at heart! That written charge of our sins conclusively proves our guilt and condemns us to death. But God did not execute the just sentence against us. Instead, he forgave our sins, nailing the charges against us to the cross. When criminals were crucified, the charge against them was nailed above their head. \**Our* charges were nailed to *Jesus’* cross, and he received the full punishment our sins deserved—divine wrath, Godforsakenness, shame, torture, death. Only at such great cost could God forgive your sins and mine.

But contrary to outward appearances, Jesus’ death was anything but a defeat. Paul explains in verse 15, “***And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.***” The powers and authorities refer to Satan and his demons, who steal and kill and destroy by leading the world in rebellion against its Maker. Satan, “the Accuser,” was armed with his charges against us. But with our charges nailed to the cross, he is disarmed and powerless to accuse us any longer. Since our sins are forgiven and our debt canceled, we share with Christ in the complete victory. Paul uses the image of a triumph parade. Christ, our victorious general publicly defeated his enemies on the cross, displaying their powerlessness to everyone. Though the devil and his forces may attack us still, they are powerless to harm anyone who is in Christ, and their defeat is sure.

This passage is meaningful to me personally. My mother told me her pastor’s wife prayed Colossians 2:15 over me at my dedication: that I would proclaim the gospel, triumphing over demonic rulers by the message of the cross. [There’s a picture from my dedication in 1988.] The way by which Jesus triumphed was through persevering in obedience to his Father, even dying on the cross. This way of suffering is the way Jesus pioneered for all who would follow him to victory. When we take up our cross to follow Jesus through hardships—even pandemics or social unrest—we will certainly share in his triumph! Because there is complete fullness in Christ, we don’t have to fear losing anything in this world. Christ is enough, and nothing can separate us from his love.

Praise Jesus, in whom is divine fullness! Praise Jesus for his heroic sacrifice and overwhelming victory through which we can have fullness in him! May we take deep roots in Christ and, nourished by the gospel revealed in Scripture, live our lives in the fullness of Christ. And let us proclaim the message of Christ with sincerity and power, reveal competing philosophies as hollow and deceptive, and magnify Christ as the all-surpassing treasure that he is!

