

Experiencing Christ as All in All

How the Lord becomes all to us

To experience Christ as all in all, we just need to let Him fill us in every area so that we are persons who are virtually defeated by the Lord. We do not win the battles. He wins them. He captures us, He defeats us, and He becomes everything to us in our experience in a progressive way. When we as God's people come together as the church with this realization, we are not an organization, not a movement. We are not trying to make something work, but rather we are people being filled with Christ all day long. In the details of our daily living - husband and wife relationships, our work life, our relationships with others - we know that in ourselves we are wretched. We may have critical thoughts, grudges, unforgiving feelings within us. There is nothing good. There is not one good thing in us. Our wretchedness comes up on the screen again and again, but it is another occasion to recognize, "Lord, there is nothing in me. I am not the savior." So we can call the precious name of Jesus and make contact and interact with this Person and tell Him to live in us. This is how we handle everything.

Never graduating from abiding

You know John 15, "Abide in Me." This is something we never graduate from. Our initial salvation happened at one point. We were born of God. And then we may have experienced the Holy Spirit in power. The fullness of the Spirit came upon us. That happened to me in 1964. There was an initial experience of the power of the Spirit. And since then I have passed through many experiences. But there is one thing that is not just for one time only, and that is simply the Lord's words, "Abide in Me. Stay with Me. Do not leave Me." Through the years many of us have enjoyed this reality of abiding. In the Christian world today there are a lot of tangents - a lot of things that are emphasized and become the factors of people being motivated to go for this or that. They may not be bad things. They may be good things. But so many things can replace Christ. Paul said it in Colossians 2:8: "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."

God being subjectively all in all

God's one goal is Christ - that we could be filled with Him, saturated with Him, so that He could become all to us. This has been our burden in the last days. There is just a deeper sense that the movement of history and the purpose of my life and your life as regenerated believers is one thing. Everything is moving in one direction, and that direction is this - that God would be all in all. God wants to be all. But He does not want to be all merely outside of us. He wants to be all within us and between us. Then God has a habitation that He acts through, He thinks through, He feels through, He loves through, He can move through. This is how God is all and in all.

Let us look at 1 Corinthians 15:24: "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power." This means God is going to reign over everything insubordinate in us and over everything insubordinate in this universe. He is going to rule, and everything is going to be subdued. So get ready for the Lord to take you over, because this is what He is doing.

We need Him and He needs us

God wants to possess us. He needs us, just as a vine needs the branches. Imagine a vine without branches! Where is the fruit going to be? Where is the expression? Where is the glory of the vine without branches? On one hand, as branches we need the Vine. We cannot live without the Vine. In fact, without Christ the Vine we would be nothing. We have to draw from Him. I need Him every hour. I need Him to think. I need

Him to react. I need Him in my experience. Without Him I can do nothing. So as branches we need the Vine. But as the Vine, He needs us. How is He going to express Himself without His branches, without the ability to bear fruit through us?

The Lord wants to be everything. For this to happen, He needs our bodies. He needs our mind. He needs our emotions. He needs our will. He needs our whole being. But when we consider ourselves and our history, when we look at our condition, we realize we are broken down, we are faulty. We need to go to "the repair shop." It seems that we do not have anything to offer. But thank God, He has cleansed us by the blood. He has terminated us, crucified us, taken us out of the way. Now we have the privilege of bringing back our usurped being, these members that have been usurped by the devil. My mind, my emotion, and my will have been independent and rebellious to God. Now I can bring back my members, one member at a time. Today my eyes can turn. "Lord Jesus, my eyes belong to You - what I look at, what I read, what I take in. Cleanse me."

On one side, I acknowledge that there is corruption in me. On the other side, I acknowledge that I have Another life that is filling me. It is in me. I can get in on His feelings now. I get to merge with what He feels. That is why the joy is with us, the peace is with us, the happiness is with us. It is because He lives in us. "My joy," He said, "is going to be in you. And your joy will be full, because I am so joyful in here. And now, just be compatible with Me. That is all I am asking you to do. Just be compatible."

Condemnation or compatibility?

Romans 8:1 tells us that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. So when we are "under the pile," it is not a matter of condemnation, but of being incompatible with the Lord's life. When we talk in a way that the Lord is not talking, we feel uncomfortable. It does not fit. And we wonder why we feel that way. It is very simple. We have grieved the Holy Spirit. We were not compatible with Him in what we just said. Even though we may have been right in what we were saying, it produced death. We have many experiences of going down these "dead-end streets." We talk this way, we talk that way, and eventually we just get dead. So we learn - "Lord, my life is natural. But Your life is transcendent." We realize that His life is going the second mile. It is turning the other cheek. It is not just doing what is fair (Matt. 5-7). We are living by something that is so transcendent. We are getting acquainted with that life, becoming compatible with that life, so that He is everything. He is becoming all to us. So our bodies, our minds, our souls, can be brought back, and we can present our members, as Paul says in Romans 6:13, "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." Hallelujah! We are one with this Person now.

God is after all. You cannot be a Christian and escape the fact that God wants all. There is no halfway. It is not even 99 percent. It has to be all. That is the only way, because God wants to be all. Look at it from that point of view. Give all? That may seem threatening. You may think, "I am going to lose my fun in life. I am going to lose my ability to choose my way." Well, yes, you will. But that is okay, because God will be your all.

A personal testimony

God wants all because He wants to be all. Years ago this focused in my experience over one thing in my life. I was in the ministry. I was serving in a denomination, and I was seeking the Lord. I was telling the Lord these very words, "Lord, I want You to have all." I really was desperate. While I prayed that prayer, the speaking of the Lord in my heart came like a knife, and it was this: "Burn your sermons." I had two volumes of typewritten, alliteratively-outlined expository sermons I had preached for two years as a young man. Those sermons were on my shelf and I used to sit back and think, "My, I have enough sermons every day for two months if I had to go somewhere." And my pride just fed on what I had accomplished in those sermons. So when I said, "Lord, take all," He said, "Burn your sermons."

I started to weep. I thought, "Maybe He just wants me to be willing to burn my sermons." But as I prayed,

the knife was just there. I could not move. The Spirit in me was just that way. "Burn the sermons." It was actually going to happen. Anyway, my whole life was wrapped up in those sermons. I have found out since then that when God goes for all, it is not just generic. It is not just general. It usually focuses on a struggle over one thing in your life. And that one thing represents surrender, total surrender. With me, I might have thought it was other things. But God touched the thing that meant the most to my self-life.

So I took those messages, the sermons, the two volumes, to the incinerator. I put them in and actually put the match in. And they started to burn. I will never forget thinking, "Oh, I am going to be a spiritual giant now." It was like, "Oh, I have given everything to God." I thought I would have an exhilarated feeling. But the interesting thing was, as I walked across the parking lot, the Lord spoke to me, "Now your seminary notes." "O God, I did not bargain for this." Anyway, that was what happened. So the notes also went.

Then the Lord shut me up to the Word for eight months. He told me, "Don't read any other thing. Fast from newspapers, from every other reading." So I took the Old Testament in the morning, Psalms and Proverbs at noon, and the New Testament in the evening. The Lord spoke to me, "Don't you go get three points. Don't you get a sermon. Don't you try to outline the Bible. You go to the Word to meet Me and feed on Me." He touched me. The verse He gave me was Jeremiah 15:16. It was like honey poured into my heart: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy words were unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." I entered into a new dimension that I had never known before. At that time, I was passing through some things and praying for the Lord to be my all. I had not been very successful in what I was passing through. I felt very defeated in myself. But I found out that after I started doing this, within one week there was a supply welling up in me that I did not even realize was there. The problems I was struggling with were gone.

Experiencing the expulsive power of a new affection

In the nineteenth century Thomas Chalmers, a Scottish preacher, gave a message with a very striking title: The Expulsive Power of a New Affection. His main point was that when a new affection lays hold of you, it is able to expel everything else. And this is what happened to me in my experience. I refocused my attention from trying to deal with myself to the Word. I put myself on the shelf and just let it be. And I turned to the Word and began to feed on the Word and drink the Word. I could not believe what happened. I know that this was a major crisis that ultimately opened up the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. Immediately after that, I came out of the denomination. The Lord led us into ways we had not even dreamed of. And today, after all these years, He is richer, He is more precious, and He is just as fresh as He was that day. And the realization of His Body, the church, with all the saints, is becoming more and more a reality. So our burden is just to talk about God as all. Let Him be all. He wants to be all. This is His goal.

The universal significance of our daily life

Let us go back to 1 Corinthians 15 and look at more verses. Verse 25 says, "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet." That is, God must reign until He has put all enemies under Christ's feet. Then verses 27-28 say, "For He has put all things under His feet. But when He says all things are put under Him, it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." This is referring to the kingdom, to the movement in the Son's administration of the Father's plan. This administration is to put all the enemies down, and to subject everything to Him, that God would be all, not merely in an objective way, but God would be all in all subjectively.

These verses prove that not one thing in our daily life is insignificant. Everything we pass through has universal consequences, because it is part of God's administration in this universe. We have a purpose. There is a goal. There is a destiny. We are moving with Him and in Him toward that goal - for the kingdom to be a reality and for God to be all in all. This is happening right now with us as members of His Body, the church. As we are touching the Head, He is becoming everything to us. This is why God is interested even in your shopping - whether He is shopping or you are shopping. It is not a matter of whether you have money or do not have money. It is not a matter of whether you can spend or cannot spend. It is a matter of

who is doing the spending - God or we? He is the source. I am not my own. I do not have rights anymore. I have been bought with a price. He is my life. So everything is out of Him, and everything is through Him, and everything is unto Him.

Look at Romans 11:36: "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." You cannot get more inclusive. This verse means that God is the source, He is the means, and He is the goal of all things. Following this verse is Romans 12:1 which says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Now let me ask you, after reading verse 36, is it reasonable to hand over ourselves as a living sacrifice? Does it say, "Of Him, through Him, and to Him are some things"? "Most things"? No, it does not say that. It says, "All things." Amen! Isn't that thrilling?

And when we hand ourselves over, we become like a little baby. We are just released inside because we are not the lord anymore. He is the Lord. And all we know how to do is let Him defeat us. We may see our strength, we may see our resistance. This is what happened to me recently. As I was getting ready for this trip, we were late in getting things packed, and my disposition was starting to come out. I was in the office with sisters who co-work with me, and I know they felt the intensity of my disposition. As I was just ready to leave for the airport, I knew the Lord was speaking in me, "Bill, what are you doing? Serving Me? You are going to go speak? I want to defeat you right now. Apologize to the sisters." I said, "Sisters, I am sorry for me coming out." And they said, "Oh, it is mutual." That is the Body.

But the point is that I let the Lord defeat me again in that little battle. All I can say is that I do not know any other way to have the church on this earth except to experience Christ and let Him be all. And when He is all, then we gather ourselves together and start glorifying Him, praising Him, and letting that supply come through every member. That is the church! It is not an organized thing that we are trying to do. It is experiencing Christ as our all in so many details of our daily living because we are under the vision of what He wants.

The reason for our problems

Now look at Ephesians 1:22: "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church." Christ is the One that is the Head over all things to the church. We are not the Head. We are not in charge. It is not our responsibility to change any kind of feeling within us, any anxiety, anything within our being going in another direction. It is not our responsibility to change ourself. But it is your responsibility and my responsibility to touch Him, to open to Him, to interact with Him, to hold Him and seize Him as the Head. It is not a self-changing program. We are joined to the Head. He wants to transmit the energy of His resurrection life into these hearts, minds, and emotions. He wants to transform us with the very essence of Himself.

So do you know why you have problems? Do you know why you have your disposition? Do you know why you have your quirks? You have them in order that you, as a unique member, would experience Christ as your Head. He supplies you in your weakness so that you will be a rich supply of life to the church, His Body. Your problem is not a mistake. There are no mistakes over us. There are no second causes. There are no accidents. We are purchased property, and we are in a process that results in God being all in our lives. So we just have to reckon with the Lord, "Thank You for every kind of problem - for my lame feet, for my weaknesses, for my inabilities - because Lord, it only tells me that I need You. It is a little conscious reminder that I need You. I need You every hour." This is the way it is supposed to be.

Think of Paul and the thorn in his flesh. He was the apostle Paul, who wrote 14 letters in the New Testament. Yet he had a tendency toward being lifted up. He admits it: "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure" (1 Cor. 12:7). What was the thorn for? The thorn was for Paul to experience an all-sufficient grace, an all-sufficient God. Leaving that tendency in him was God's way of keeping him dependent. So do not despise your weaknesses. Do not despise your frailties. Only let them be raw material to let Him become all to you. That is what is happening. He wants to be all. If God could have

people on this earth that interact with Him in this way, then the church would emerge. There is no other way for the church to emerge.

How the church emerges on the earth

You cannot promote the church. You cannot sell it. You cannot program it. You have to have the Head becoming all to every member. Then the church will be the church. When Christ happens in you, the church happens. It is that simple. Ephesians 1:22-23 tells us that Christ is the "Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." The verb "fills" is in the present tense, which means it is a continuous filling. Though I may have experienced the Lord last week, that is not sufficient for today. I need Him today. I need a fresh opening today to let Him be all. Then the church becomes the fullness.

Here is my body. I have a fullness. I am not just a head here. I have a body, which is my fullness. It is an expression. In the same way, Christ is the Head of His Body, the fullness. Can you believe we are the fullness of Him? We are the fullness of Him. So when we are enjoying Him, He is filling us, He is being all. He is filling all in all. Verses like these are all over the New Testament. We may read them in a light way - "All, all, He is all." But He is all!

Letting the Lord defeat us

Look at the first part of Ephesians 4:8: "Therefore He says: When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive." This means we were captives of the enemy. Saul of Tarsus was a captive of the enemy. But in Christ's ascension He led all the captivity captive. In His death, resurrection, and ascension - His universal traveling and all that He accomplished - He defeated all His foes. Then verses 8-10 continue, "And [He] gave gifts to men. (Now this, He ascended - what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)" Here is the traffic and travel of this Christ in His descension and ascension. What is this all for? Verse 10 tells us: "That He might fill all things."

Then verse 11 says, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers." We appreciate brothers serving the Lord, but often too much emphasis is placed upon who is an apostle, who is a prophet, who is a teacher. We ask ourselves, "What am I? What is my ministry?" So many times the emphasis is on this. But read the context of these verses. All that these persons are, and all that they should be, are persons whom the Lord has defeated. He led captivity captive. He took a Saul of Tarsus and defeated him. This man was doing his own thing, and then the Lord subdued him. He became like a little child and said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6). And the Lord said to Saul, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." This means the Lord did not even grant Saul the privilege of His direct speaking. Sometimes He is requiring us to humble ourselves to other members in the Body. Saul was not sent to Peter, but to Ananias. We do not even know who Ananias was. He was just there. He was a brother. It was Ananias who told Saul that the Lord had appeared to him for this purpose - to make him a minister and a witness (Acts 22, 26).

Saul was defeated by the Lord. Then that defeated man was given back to the Body as a gift. Do you want to be useful to the Lord? Do you want to serve? Do you want the Lord to use you? There is only one qualification, and that is - has He defeated you? In your marriage relationship, do you have the last word with your husband? Do you have the last word with your wife? Has the Lord defeated your self-vindication? Have you given in to Him to let Him be your life? If we live letting the Lord defeat us, we cannot help but supply life to people, even if we never open our mouth. God will radiate from our being. First Peter 3:1-6 tells us that a wife with a meek and a quiet spirit can win the husband without a word. This indicates that when a person experiences God inwardly, death works in him, but life works in others. This is how the Lord fills all things - by causing His servants to be brothers and sisters who are defeated in every stronghold in their life, who surrender all to let Him be all.

The meaning of all

When we talk about "all," this does not mean that you have to come up to a certain level. It does not mean that you have to come up to be "all for God." He meets you right where you are. If you are on the floor, then you surrender yourself there. You are unable to get up. Just tell Him, "Lord, I am on the floor." If you feel you are not willing to give everything, then you tell Him, "Lord, I am not willing to give everything." That means you surrender all. It does not mean you surrender your perfection. It means you surrender your imperfection. It does not mean you surrender your determination. It means you surrender your sense of failure, and you tell Him, "God, I am a failure." The point is, you do not touch anything on your own. You do not handle yourself. We are not qualified. Christ is our life. Christ is now our relationship with everything. He is our relationship with the Father. He is our relationship with the saints. He is our relationship with the flesh. He is our relationship with the world, with the devil, and with sin. Christ has come to live in us as our life, to be our relationship with everything.

So our one occupation is to handle Christ. Just consider one thing as an illustration: When the Father created the universe, He did it in Christ. All things were created in Him, through Him, and unto Him. And John 1:3 says, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not one thing came into being which has come into being." That means everything that came into being came into being through Christ. The Father did not touch one thing in the universe apart from His Son. He handled everything with Christ. The audacity of man to challenge the Father's wisdom by handling anything apart from Christ! Who am I to handle my mind, to handle my life, to handle my problems? Who am I? Christ is the anointed One, appointed to do everything, to be everything. He is the Heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you have been made full in Him (Col. 2:9-10).

Christ has the first place

Relate to yourself by handling Christ first, so that in everything He would have the first place. Our burden is that Christ could become all in all subjectively. Wherever that is, that is the church, expressing Him properly. Then one day He will come. In His coming He is going to reign to put all His enemies, one by one, group by group, under His feet. He is going to reign until all is under His feet. Then He will deliver the kingdom to God (1 Cor. 15:24). In eternity past He covenanted with the Father to take us - the chosen ones that the Father gave to Him - and to keep us and shepherd us from eternity past, through time, into eternity future. We have all been given by the Father to the Son. And one day we are all going to be presented to the Father as a kingdom. Christ did it. He did it all the way. And now He is all in all. Since He has become our life and He has become our all, now God is all in all. This is the vision of our living. This is the vision we have when we wake up in the morning. This is the vision that should control us - that God would become all. Vision makes a difference. It makes all the difference.

However, when you have vision, it does not mean that you will never again find yourself "halfway down the block" in your mind. You did not plan to think those thoughts, but you are down the block before you even realize it. When this happens, oftentimes we are caught by the devil. He says, "See, you are no good. You are just this way." Then you may think that the Lord is not your all. But no, that is not it. The moment you find yourself halfway down the block in your mind, just say, "Lord Jesus, be my life. At this moment, You be my life. You be my reaction. You be my thinking."

We just have to learn how to walk in the Spirit and not carry out things that start in us - the lusts of the flesh, its reactions (Gal. 5:16). When Paul speaks of the lusts of the flesh, it is in the context of biting and devouring others. There is a lust to bite. There is a lust to devour. But Paul says to walk in the Spirit and you will not carry it out. He does not say that if you walk in the Spirit you will not have the lust. He says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." There is a big difference. So when you find yourself feeling a certain way, you can interrupt it. This is where you need to learn how to be rude - just say "Jesus." Let Him defeat you. Then He can make home in your heart (Eph. 3:17).

God wants all. He wants a testimony to all the nations that He is all in all. What a joy to realize on this earth, in this hour, that He is on His way back. His kingdom is coming. We can participate in this in our daily life. We are part of God's administration when we are letting Him defeat us and we are just being reduced to Christ. Amen.

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