

Giving the Lord First Place

All the fullness concentrated in Christ

The most awesome description of Christ in the Bible revealing Him as the One who has the first place in all things is found with the words in Colossians 1:19 — “*all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him.*” This is the same as saying there is nothing outside of Christ. Don’t go outside of Christ. Don’t even take a little trip someplace else, someplace apart from Him, be it to your self-life, be it to anything of the world, anything that fascinates you. Don’t go outside of Him. Don’t look at yourself outside of Him. Don’t contemplate yourself outside of Him. There is nothing outside of Him.

The revelation of Christ as the concentration of all the fullness is the communication of a burden that Christ would so totally be all to us that we would just find ourselves falling into His arms over and over again. Just as John 1:18 says, we are “*into* (εἰς) the bosom of the Father,” into that love-life over and over again, whatever we may be passing through. It is as if the Father is saying, “My Son is the concentration and focus of all the fullness in this universe.” This tells us that before any kind of history took place, the Father designated that the fullness of everything would dwell in His Son. That is how much Christ is “front and center.” And the reconciliation of this universe is happening wherever Christ is supreme, exalted, has first place, is the theme, is the atmosphere, is the conversation, is the love, is the glory, is the majesty. What God is doing in this universe is exalting and magnifying His Son, Christ. This is His pleasure. So

we need to be taken totally out of ourself by being enthralled and occupied exclusively with the Son of God.

The unique reason Christ has first place in all things

Colossians 1:18b says, “That He Himself might have the first place in all things.” A more literal translation would be, “So that in all things He Himself becomes the first place.” He *becomes* the first place in all things. Then we see that verses 18 and 19 are connected by the word “because.” This little “because” assigns *the reason why* Christ has become first place in all things. It is “*Because in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell.*” The Bible commentator, R. C. H. Lenski helps us understand this connection. Speaking of the conjunction “because,” he says, “ὅτι [hoti] states the evidential reason by which we know that the God-man is what verse 18 states he is; it corresponds to ὅτι [hoti] occurring in verse 16, which is to be understood in the same sense.” Thus, the thoughts in verses 18 and 19 must be taken together. All the fullness being pleased to dwell in Christ *is* the unique reason He has the first place in all things. This is what practically motivates us for Christ to become first place in all things in our experience. The pure revelation of such fullness dwelling in Christ produces in us *the reason* for Him to have first place in all things.

Do we know why Christ has first place in our life? Oh, brothers and sisters, it is *because* in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell. It is not even because I think I need to give Him first place. It is not because I

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have been so bad and wayward. It is not because I am so rebellious. It is not because I need to get it together and give my all. This is like kicking a donkey — “Come on now. Get going! You’ve been in one place too long. Now get on with it!” That is not the reason! No, He has first place because of one unique reason — “Because in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell.” This is revelation. This is light concerning what motivates us to give all to the Lord and let Him be the first place in all things. This is saying, “Lord, You have the first place because You *are* the first place. *Before* I was born, *before* I had a history, *before* there was my failing condition, *before* all the considerations of my subjective self, it was the delight and pleasure of all the fullness that all the positive things in the universe be concentrated and permanently dwell in You.” This is the unique reason why Christ has the first place in all things. This is the unique reason why I give Him first place in my life.

The deep significance of “all” in God’s thought

Let me illustrate how Christ is all. Consider Christ as a large bowl filled with many items. Look into this bowl. Behold *all the fullness* in this bowl. The *Godhead* is in this bowl. *Eternity past* is in this bowl. All *creation* is in this bowl. *Time* is in this bowl. *Redemption* is in this bowl. The *church* is in this bowl. The *kingdom* is in this bowl. *Eternity future* is in this bowl. These are the items that compose all the fullness. All these items together make up all the fullness. They all have only one unique pleasure, that is, to dwell in this bowl — God’s Christ!

This is the deep significance of *all* in God’s thought. In our thought *all* may be limited to things such as all my money, all my time, all my future, all my material possessions. That may be the extent of what all means to us. But in God’s thought, all means all the fullness dwelling in Christ. The revelation of all from God’s view — that *all* is concentrated in Christ — will radically change our life. We will be a person who sees that the meaning of our very existence is in this One in whom all the fullness is concentrated and embodied. Then we know what we were made for and what the universe was made for. This is how high and how immense our Christ is. He is more majestic than we could ever imagine. He is beyond what we could ever conceive.

The excellency of the knowledge of Christ

The apostle Paul gave Christ first place in all things.

Otherwise, how could he have such a testimony, saying, “I count all things as *dung*”? Where did he get that word? It is translated in various ways in English — dung, refuse, rubbish, worthless trash. “Dung” is a word the Holy Spirit used from the experience of a man who was under the revelation of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. I have often felt, “Dear Lord, I would like to get into a crevice of Paul’s heart. I want to know the kind of Christ he knew.” In Philippians 3:8-9 he declares, ⁸ “But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith.” Paul did not want to have even a shred of his own righteousness. He was saying, “I do not want anything in myself that could boast or merit something or establish something before God and feel satisfied that I did something. I do not want one bit of my righteousness. I want the righteousness which is of God by faith, *that I may know Him*” (Phil. 3:10). Thus, standing in Christ as all my righteousness is the key to knowing Him in an ever-deepening way. I want to know Him and all that He is as He lives in me and operates in me. I do not want to be satisfied with my own man-made righteousness proceeding from myself. I want to know Him.

Do we see this? This is the testimony of a man who sees Christ in such a way that all else fades away into oblivion. This is the revelation of Christ given to us in Colossians chapter 1. It is the kind of vision where we see that in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell. Such a seeing of Christ has the power to become the unique reason for Christ to be first place in all things in our lives. Oh, we need to see such an immense Christ!

The transmittable and executable Christ

Now this Christ is transmittable and executable. This is because He was processed through His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ was identified with every kind of temptation that we touch in our daily life. He defeated every foe and won every battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Not only that, He conquered death itself and became in resurrection a life-giving Spirit, so that all the residing

fullness in Him is transmittable to us. Now Christ can be instantly executed from within our spirit.

In regeneration our spirit was joined to the Lord, making possible the direct transmission of His life into us (1 Cor. 6:17; 15:45). Oh, what a vision — that such a Person has now become One who is on our level, and not only on our level, but on our level inside of us. Now in our spirit, when we pray and sing and just join ourselves with this One, then all the fullness that has been pleased to dwell in Him, including God's essence and nature, is transmitted into our being so that He not only transforms our soul but He gives life to our mortal bodies.

This is our Christ today. All the fullness concentrated in Him is transmittable to us and executable in us and for us (Col. 1:19; 2:9-10). This means Christ is all-sufficient to us. The more we see how all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him, the more He will be all-sufficient to us. What happens with such an awesome revelation of Christ is that we discover His all-sufficiency. That is the net effect over our being — His life is sufficient for everything. This all-sufficiency of Christ is over us that we might experience all that He is in His immense and expansive fullness.

The discerning ability of seeing the all-sufficiency of Christ

Because Paul saw such an all-sufficient Christ, he could deal with the distractions that entered in among the Colossian believers: "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ" (2:8). Look at Paul's discernment concerning things that distract from Christ. Once you see Christ the way God sees Christ, you will have an automatic discernment concerning the things that differ from Christ and are substitutes for Him (cf. Phil. 1:9-10). It is not a matter of judging or condemning anything or anyone. It is a matter of discerning.

When you are under the revelation of the all-sufficiency of Christ and you see that in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, you can evaluate everything. The revelation has discerning ability. It discerns the emphasis today in the whole professing Christian world. It discerns the Christian magazines. It discerns the stories and reports circulating in the Christian world. It discerns the focus of all the Christian activities and seminars. It

discerns the Christian book stores. It discerns the "how-to" books, the psychology books, even the books on handling your money and having a better marriage. I do not mean that God cannot be in all these things, but I am saying that so many believers today are focused on these kinds of things, and the all-sufficiency of Christ is diminished. There is not a taste and an aroma of Christ. Instead, it is a philosophy. It is a *way* of doing things. It is methods, procedures, and principles to live by. It is adjusting your life. It is solving your problems. We cannot say that all these things are bad. They may be good. But good is not necessarily God. From the very beginning of the Bible, there was the tree of the knowledge of *good* and evil, signifying an independent self-life with Satan as its source.

In Colossians 2:8 Paul is burdened to warn believers of the distractions so that no one would carry them off through these substitutes, which are not according to Christ. What are we according to? We must be according to Christ. In verse 9 Paul assigns the reason *why* we should be according to Christ: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The conjunction "for" can also be translated "because." It is the same conjunction, ὅτι [*hoti*], used in Colossians 1:19, which tells us *why* Christ has the first place in all things.

In verses 8 and 9 Paul gives us a clear comparison. He compares the Christ who embodies the fullness of the Godhead with the superficial realm of philosophy, empty deceit, the tradition of men, and the elements of the world. This comparison shows us that the real fullness of our life is to be found in being completely occupied with the Person of Jesus Christ. Fullness is not found anywhere else but in Christ. All the fullness in Colossians 1:19 includes the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him bodily in Colossians 2:9. And not only is the Godhead, in Their *existence*, part of all the fullness, but the entire *economy* of the Godhead is also part of all the fullness.

We are made full in Him

Paul continues in verse 10: "And you have been made full in Him, who is the Head of all rule and authority." The word "fullness" in verse 9 and the words "made full" in verse 10 come from the same Greek word. Thus, Paul first reveals Christ as the embodiment of all the fullness, and then he says, "And you have been made full in Him." The verb "have been made full" is in

Giving our all for His all

the perfect tense — the tense that describes a permanent state of being. So it can mean that even with all the philosophy, tradition of men, and other distracting things, even with your hearts broken and suffering due to these kinds of things (2:2), you are still presently in a state of fullness in Him.

Christ is your real point of reference; you are made full in Him. All the fullness dwells in Him, and you are in Him. So we do not *arrive* at fullness. We do not stretch forth and seek to somehow attain fullness. We start out in fullness because we are joined to fullness — we are joined to Christ — and fullness is our life (Col. 3:4). Fullness is our permanent state. Fullness is our real situation. Are you not in Christ? Is your spirit not intertwined and joined with the One in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily? Are you not right now joined to Christ in your spirit? Now, what will you relate to when you wake up in the morning? Will you relate to the self, with all the thoughts and feelings of the soul life? Or will you relate to your real life? When you relate to Christ, your real life, you relate to your state of fullness. Thus, our constant point of reference is always Christ. Our beginning is Christ. We do not travel to reach Christ. He is our starting point. I do not care where I am or how I am — on the floor, under the floor, or up against a wall. My starting point is always Christ, where all the fullness dwells.

So practically in our experience we must see that all the fullness includes all the fullness of the Godhead and that we are made full in *that* fullness. That fullness is described in John 17:10, where Jesus says, “And all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.” This means the fullness in the Godhead is being transmitted into us. We are made full with the riches of Their nature and essence. Jesus is glorified *in* us. That is why it is so utterly important to be done with a life of introspection. In this fullness we are through with morbid introspection over ourselves — analyzing the self, our failures, and our fears about the future. We must be done with that kind of life and ever keep our spirit in its proper order — fixed on Christ. This is what Paul is saying in Colossians 2:5: “I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.” Our order is faith in the Person who is our fullness. This is the proper order of our being. Our order is our enjoyment of the fullness of Christ, where we receive grace upon grace (John 1:16). We receive His all. With Christ, God freely gives us all things (Rom. 8:32).

Who would not give all for this? All includes everything. It includes every emotion, every reaction, every kind of environment that we cope with, the hopeless feelings that sweep over our soul, the depression that seizes us. Nothing is as bad and wrenching as depression. It grips you like a vice so that your feelings seemingly cannot rise. Depression is a horrible state to be in. But we can even surrender that state to the Lord. Who can get out of that state? We bring our state to Him by calling upon His name (cf. Lam. 3:52-57). In that call — “Jesus” — is the revelation of all the fullness that was pleased to dwell in Him. That fullness met death and conquered it. It broke through demonic regions and realms. It defeated every region of the enemy’s domain. And whether I feel His victory or I don’t feel it, I declare that Name. Whether I have an instantaneous change or I don’t have any change, I speak that Name. We do not walk by sight. We walk by faith. Sight is what we see. Sight is what we can feel. It may be that to us God is our own subjective feeling. But God is not our feeling. God is God! So by faith we say, “Thank You, Jesus, You are the Victor. You broke through the regions of death and hell and Hades. You broke through it all. Now You are far above all to be my all.”

It is an awesome thing to see that in Christ all the fullness was pleased to dwell — it is for this reason that He has first place in all things. Giving the Lord first place in our lives should not be motivated by obligation or duty, but by a revelation of His rightful place in this universe according to God’s point of view. What an unsearchably rich Christ we have!

— Bill Freeman

the Christian

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