

The Fulness of Christ

It pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell. Col 1:19

In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Col 2:9

The Lord Jesus Christ is the fulness of the Godhead in human bodily form. He is the invisible God made flesh and visible to men. This is the central feature of the NT revelation; Christ is God come to earth to save the elect.

As such it is the duty of Christian teachers to emphasise the pre-eminence of Christ at every opportunity and to explain what the fulness of God is.

The mystery of the Gospel, unknown in OT times, is that Christ is the Head of the Church, which is his body and that salvation is by uniting elect people with Christ in spiritual union. The Gospel is, ‘Christ in us the hope of glory’. The wonder of the church and kingdom is us in Christ, ‘the church which is his body’.

Since Christ is the centre of everything that pertains to hope and glory, and the focal point of all God’s purposes in creation, it behoves us to look carefully at the fulness that is Christ.

Technical matters

First, we have to explain certain technical background points as to Paul’s emphasis upon Christ being the fulness in the book of Colossians.

The word ‘fulness’

This is the Greek word *pleroma*, which means: that which is (has been) filled, that which fills or with which a thing is filled, fulness, abundance, completeness, a fulfilling, keeping; what is beyond measure overflowing amount, wealth, abundance, as entirety of measurement sum total, full measure, the complete amount. Here it means, ‘*the state of fulness, or the contents of it*'.¹

It is a powerful word with deep theological meaning that has been used by various religious groups.

In simple terms regarding Christ it means that the Lord Jesus has all the fulness of God in him, ‘*unchangeably, absolutely and essentially*'.² All that pertains to God is found in Jesus.

The context is particularly regarding redemption; that is, all the fulness of grace, power and authority dwells in Christ in order to redeem the elect.

Pleroma: the Gnostic context

It pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell. Col 1:19

Paul uses the word *pleroma* in connection with the Colossians for a reason. The verses above are proof positive that Jesus Christ is God. He is not a mode of God (modalism,

¹ John Eadie; Colossians, p70, Klock & Klock (1980 reprint).

² Sic Eadie; Col. op.cit., p71.

Dynamic Monarchianism). He is not an elevated man adopted by God (Adoptionism). He is not divine but junior to the Father (Gnosticism). He is not the first creature made by God (Arianism). However, chiefly for the issues facing the Colossians, Jesus is not a mere emanation from God (Gnosticism, *aeon*).

In Gnostic theology the divine sends a series of mediatorial angels ('aeons') emanating downwards from himself to men to give gifts. The highest *aeon* is Christ who united himself with human nature, but not in a real incarnation.

The early stages of Gnosticism were erupting in Paul's time and the Colossians were closest to these influences.³ Gnosticism would later develop its theosophy⁴ under heretics like Valentinus and Cerinthus. Kabbalists would also heavily feature the idea of *pleroma*. Several of Paul's comments are thought to be combating primitive Gnostic tendencies that the Colossians saints were exposed to.

Hence Paul's strong affirmation that the *pleroma* (a word emphasised by the Gnostics), the fulness of divinity, abides in Christ; Christ is God. Christ is not an angel or *aeon*; he is not an emanation from God; he is God. Furthermore, Christ created angels and all other powers in creation (Col 1:16). They exist for him.

'Bodily' the Docetic context

In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Col 2:9

A doctrine commonly associated with Gnostic cults was Docetism. This averred that the Son of God could not have a human body because material things were corrupted by evil and the Son of God is divine and pure. Thus developed the idea that the body of Christ was a mere phantom or appearance of flesh, or was a type of divine likeness to flesh, but was not born of a human being.

Paul goes out of his way to dispel such ideas emphasising that Jesus Christ was the fulness of God, not a mere aspect of the divine, but in a human body.

Christ the Fulness

What does it mean that Christ is the fulness of God?

Christ is God

In essence it means that the person Jesus Christ is all that God is. He is one in essence with God. He shares all God's attributes, virtues, power, authority and glory.

Jesus is not an aspect of the divine, not a mode of the divine, not a part of the divine – he is divine.

All the perfections of God are in Christ, as eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, independence, and necessary existence, and every other, or he would not be equal with God; nor could all the fulness of the Godhead be said to dwell in him.⁵

³ Along with the Galatians.

⁴ Literally 'wise concerning God'; a term applied to human philosophies about God rather than true theology. It is usually applied to any of a number of philosophies maintaining that knowledge of God may be achieved through spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or special individual relations. Today the word is usually applied to the movement founded in 1875 as the Theosophical Society by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott.

⁵ John Gill, on Col 1:19.

Furthermore, these attributes are not derived from the Father secondarily but are naturally present because Jesus is one in essence with God; a sharing of one undivided nature and essence. ‘*Christ possesses the fulness of the Godhead, not through an act of the Father’s will, but by the necessity of His nature.*’⁶

Jesus is the revelation of God in bodily form. During the incarnation, God dwelt with men.

Paul emphasises this by repeating it, in Col 2:9. He uses a word only seen here in the NT, ‘Godhead’ (Greek *theotes*). This word means deity, the divine, the divine nature, all that God is; it is where God is viewed in essence rather than personality.⁷ This fulness of God dwelt (abided, inhabited) in Christ.

It was not a part of God that appeared in Christ, as claimed by some,⁸ such as divine knowledge, will or virtue, but the whole essence of God. As for the old idea that *pleroma* here means that the whole church has its well being in Christ, this just ignores the Greek grammar. Heretics cannot cope with the doctrine that Christ is the fulness of God.

The Greek (*theotes*) means the ESSENCE and NATURE of the Godhead, not merely the divine perfections and attributes of Divinity (Greek, “*theiotes*”). He, as man, was not merely God-like, but in the fullest sense, God.⁹

Christ is God in bodily form

This divine nature appears in Christ bodily (*somatikos*). Again this word appears nowhere else in the NT.¹⁰ Jesus is God in human form.

The fulness of the divine nature, of all the perfections of deity, such as eternity, immensity, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, necessary and self existence, and every other; for if anyone perfection was wanting, the fulness, much less all the fulness of the Godhead, would not be in him.

The act of inhabitation denotes the union of the two natures in Christ, and expresses the distinction of them; and is to be understood of the Godhead, as subsisting in the person of the Son of God, and not as subsisting in the person of the Father, or of the Spirit; and shows the permanency of this union, it is a perpetual abiding one; ... the manner in which it dwells, is “bodily”; not by power, as in the universe; nor by grace, as in the saints; nor by any glorious emanations of it, as in heaven; nor by gifts, as in the prophets and eminent men of God; nor by signs symbols, and shadows, as in the tabernacle and temple; but essentially and personally, or by personal union of the divine nature, as subsisting in the Son of God to an human body, chosen and prepared for that purpose, together with a reasonable [rational] human soul; which is the great mystery of godliness.¹¹

If I were preaching I could wax lyrical on this subject, such as by emphasising that God loved the elect so much that he deigned to come to earth as a mere man, taking on human nature so that he could suffer in order for you and me to live. The depth of that commitment of the majestic and glorious God to a mere created being is ineffable. It is

⁶ Eadie; Comm. on Ephesians 1:23, Zondervan (1977) p108.

⁷ Eadie: ‘An abstract term, like Deity, in which God is viewed in essence rather than personality. The word is quite different in meaning from *theiotes*, Rm 1:20, - a term which describes quality rather than being. The words differ as *divinitas* and *deitas* [Latin] – divineness and deity.’ Col. Op. cit. p141.

⁸ Such as Socinians.

⁹ Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, Comm. on the Bible, on Col 2:9.

¹⁰ The adjective ‘bodily’ occurs twice; Lk 3:22 and 1 Tim 4:8.

¹¹ John Gill, on Col 2:9.

similar to you deciding to give your life for a worm (that is if you had created that worm). God is beyond all our praise.

The idea of some eminent commentators that *somatikos* means ‘really’ (i.e. ‘the Godhead dwells in Christ really or in substance’) must be repudiated. The basis for this idea is a non-existent polemical contrast; something not in the text.¹² The word must be taken literally – ‘in a bodily shape’, ‘corporeally’, ‘pertaining to a physical body’, ‘bodily form’, as the best lexicons affirm.¹³

Jesus is all of the divine

In the mythology of multiple false religions certain gods had certain powers and responsibilities but none had them all. Thus there was a god of the sky, or rain, of fertility, etc. There was a god responsible for the sun and another for the moon. There were gods of this animal but not other animals. There were gods for healing the body and other gods for getting a full harvest. This is the nature of worldly religion; multiple gods for various aspects of the divine.

False Christian religions also tend to break up the direction of intercession to different focal points, thus people are encouraged to pray to Mary, pray to certain saints for certain things. This is nothing but idolatry and sin.

Modern Charismatics pray to the Holy Spirit, which has no Scriptural, warrant whatsoever. The Spirit brings to us the things of Christ and glorifies him, he does not glory in himself but aids us to communicate with the Father through Christ.

Jesus Christ is different from all this nonsense. Jesus is the fulness of the godhead in bodily form. He is fully God united to man.

The fulness *bodily* only applies to the Son

There have been some in history, such as Paul of Samosata,¹⁴ who denied the doctrine of the Trinity and affirmed that if there is a Trinity, then all the three Persons were incarnated.¹⁵ That is, if Christ is the fulness of the Godhead, and he became incarnate, then all the Trinity is incarnate.

Jesus is the fulness of deity because nothing divine is lacking in him. However, the divine nature is spiritual and thus does not have parts or division. Wherever the divine nature is, it is full and perfect. The divine nature in Christ was incarnated but not as commonly to all Persons but as it is in the personal properties of the Son. The joining of the divine nature with human nature is peculiar to the Son alone. The Son before the incarnation subsisted in the divine nature alone but now also subsists in human nature.¹⁶

Thus the Word is made flesh (Jn 1:14) not the Godhead was made flesh. However, the Trinity was involved in this. The Father prepared and decreed that salvation should require

¹² Eadie gives examples and explanations of this; Col. op. cit. p143.

¹³ Such as Friberg, Louw-Nida, Thayer etc.

¹⁴ A bishop of Antioch appointed in 262; leader of the Paulianists or Samosatenians (not the same as the later Paulicians). Heresies include: Christ was born a mere man. The Son and the Holy Ghost exist in God in the same manner as the faculty of reason does in man; the reason or wisdom of the Father descended into Christ. He did not baptise in the name of the Trinity. He may be considered as the father of the Socinians. His errors were severely condemned by the council of Nice.

¹⁵ Augustine was confused about this (Enchiridion c38).

¹⁶ There are not two Persons in Christ but there are two natures. The divine nature subsists in the human nature.

the incarnation (Lk 2:31; Heb 10:5) while the Spirit applies the work of incarnating Christ (Lk 1:35). ‘*The Son of God did not take the person man, but took man into the Person*’.¹⁷ ‘*The personal Word assumed man; not a person, but the nature. It is said he assumed man, because a human soul and body were assumed*’.¹⁸

The union is a personal union of His natures – not a simple concord of will, so that there are two persons; nor such an absorption of the one element into the other, that there is only one nature.¹⁹

It has to be admitted that the joining of deity to human nature is deeply mysterious. We may not be able to fully understand it but we can make affirmations based upon what Scripture tells us. For instance:

- The divine nature was not changed or altered by the union.²⁰
- The divine nature is perfect and nothing was added to it, as that would make it imperfect. Though nothing is added to the constitution of it, there was a communion with its essence; a mutual union. The human nature subsists in the person.

It should be noted that if there was no assuming of a human nature in the Person of Christ, there could be no salvation. Christ had to become a man in order to be a substitutionary sacrifice.

Expressions of this fulness

- The work of creation (Col 1:16).
- The revelation of God (Col 1:27).
- Dispensing eternal life to the elect (Col 1:12).
- The redemption of the elect (Col 1:14).
- Reconciliation, peace, between God and man (Col 1:20-21).
- Deliverance from the enemy (Col 1:13).
- The sanctification of the church (Col 1:10, 22).
- The giving of grace and blessing to the church (Col 1:2, 11, 3:16).
- The giving of gifts to the church (Eph 4:8).
- Authority to disciple nations (Matt 28:18-20).

The deity of Christ

This is a fundamental and cardinal Christian doctrine. Any church that denies the deity of Christ²¹ is not Christian but heretical.

There are multiple places where the divinity of Jesus Christ is confirmed, as well as Scriptural descriptions where Jesus has an attribute of God, or accepts worship. Some examples include:

¹⁷ Hugo de St. Victor; Erud. Theol. de Verb. Incarn, collat. 2.

¹⁸ John Davenant; Colossians, Banner of Truth, (2005), p416.

¹⁹ Eadie; Col. op.cit. p146.

²⁰ For example, when God created the universe he became a creator, but this did not imply a change in God but was a change in matter.

²¹ Such as Christadelphians today or Ebionites in the past (the precursors of the Jewish Root Movement).

'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, "God with us." Matt 1:23

All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*. Matt 11:27

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Matt 28:18-19

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ... No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*. Jn 1:1-18

I and *My Father* are one. Jn 10:30

The Father *is in* Me, and I in Him. Jn 10:38

He who has seen Me has seen the Father. Jn 14:9

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? Jn 14:10

That they all may be one, as You, Father, *are in* Me, and I in You. Jn 17:21

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and coming* in the likeness of men. Phil 2:5-7

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9-11

Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh. 1 Tim 3:16

Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Titus 2:13

There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. 1 Jn 5:7

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. 1 Jn 5:20

The early church fought for hundreds of years to establish this doctrine as a cardinal point of faith. It is the first line of our apologetics – that Christ is God.

The fulness of divine attributes and virtue

Grace

Christ is full of grace and truth.²² Since all the treasures of grace abide in him he is able to dispense them to saints by his Spirit, as he wills. The fountain of grace is God, and Jesus is the fulness of God.

Life

Since God is the fountain of life,²³ and since Jesus is the fulness of God, then life comes through Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus himself proclaimed that he was the fountain of eternal life.²⁴

Mercy

God is the source of mercy.²⁵ Since Jesus is the fulness of God then he is the source of mercy as we approach God through Christ alone. Only Christ can give you mercy for your sins.²⁶

We could continue in a long list of divine attributes, all of which are present in Christ and many of which are communicated to his people in a certain degree.

Repercussions of this

There is no other Saviour

It pleased God to decree that salvation would be only through the provision of the Son as the Saviour of men. Man should seek salvation nowhere else. In Christ God was reconciling men to himself.²⁷ There is no other Saviour (Jn 14:6).

There is no other method of salvation

Salvation is in Jesus, the fulness of God. There is no other way of being saved, other than fleeing to Christ for mercy.

Any teaching or practice that presupposes a different salvation²⁸ or adding something to faith in Christ²⁹ is heresy and to be shunned.

²² Jn 1:14, ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth’. Jn 1:16, ‘And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace’. Jn 1:17, ‘For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’.

²³ Ps 36:9, ‘with You is the fountain of life’.

²⁴ Jn 4:14, ‘whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’. Rev 21:6, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts’.

²⁵ Ps 52:8, ‘I trust in the mercy of God forever’. Ps 57:3, ‘God shall send forth His mercy’. Ps 109:26, ‘O LORD my God! Oh, save me according to Your mercy’.

²⁶ 1 Tim 1:2, ‘Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord’. 2 Tim 1:2, ‘Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord’. Titus 1:4, ‘Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour’. 1 Pt 1:3, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again’. Jude 1:21, ‘looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life’.

²⁷ 2 Cor 5:18, ‘Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ’.

²⁸ Such as salvation through mysticism (releasing the god within you); meritorious works (achieving salvation through self-effort, e.g. Pelagianism) and so on.

²⁹ E.g. Roman Catholicism, which adds multiple issues (the authority of the church, the necessity of water baptism first, prevenient grace, human works etc.).

Interim conclusion

Any seeking of help for salvation in something other than Christ, who has the fulness of God, is sin. This applies not just to gaining salvation initially (being saved) but continuing in the faith and being saved to the end. Christ is the fountain of grace and the source of all that is needful.

Therefore those who seek the assistance of angels are wrong. Angels do not have the fulness of God; why seek angelic help when Christ is available for those who call upon him?

The philosophies of men are of no value; these are just the pondering of human beings. Why seek help in philosophy when we have the source of all wisdom and knowledge in Christ?

The Scriptures of other religions have no life-giving value. They may contain certain truths and some interesting data, but they cannot give life. The word of God is the reflection of Christ as the eternal truth, and as such is a source of life because it is a communication of Christ himself to the soul. In the Bible Christ speaks to us by his Spirit as he applies his own words to our condition.

Religious ceremonies and festal days have no value in giving life. At best, OT Jewish festivals pointed to Christ and his ministry. Since Christ has now come in fulness and reality these feasts are no longer of any value whatsoever and, indeed, Paul says that celebrating them leads to bondage.³⁰ Why would you make do with the copy, the shadow, when you had the real thing?³¹

But worse is the celebration of the festivals of other religions or of cultural traditions. These have no value in the slightest degree and should be shunned, apart from any social benefit they may enjoin.³² They have no spiritual profit.

The church is the fulness of Christ together

The church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Eph 1:22-23

That you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Eph 3:19

Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Eph 4:13

In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him. Col 2:9-10

The next amazing thing to consider is that the church as a whole, as the body, altogether comes to the measure of the fulness of Christ. No single human being could ever come close to representing the attributes of Christ, whether it be Moses, Samuel or Elijah. No single person can approach manifesting what Christ's fulness is.

Yet the whole church together can come close to this. Millions of elect people,³³ are intended to flower in their specific gift according to the grace God gives, so that the

³⁰ Gal 2:4, 4:3, 9, 24-25, 5:1.

³¹ Col 2:16-17; Heb 8:5, 10:1.

³² Such as using Christmas to be a time for gathering the family together, being in unity and love, and feasting together.

³³ I believe a third of the human race (Zech 13:8).

fellowship and community of every single person added together is a testimony to the fulness of Christ.

The church is named pleroma, or fulness, because it holds or contains the fulness of Christ. It is the filled-up receptacle of spiritual blessing, from Him, and is thus His pleroma.³⁴

The church is the fulness of him; thus Christ fills each person with grace to represent a small part of his attributes. We are only complete in him; we are nothing without him.

This is why the local church is meant to be based upon *koinonia* (fellowship) and mutual edification. The notion of one man dominating the meeting and determining the direction of the church alone is anathema. This is not Biblical church. Pyramidal ecclesiastical structures are worldly and demonic not godly.

Warning

In consideration of this deep subject we have to warn about various heresies which affirm or imply that Christians become God or 'a little god'. This heresy has become very popular in certain Word Faith Charismatic churches and is taught by several heretics whose god is their belly.³⁵

The created being, even the redeemed created being, is always a created being; as such it can never take on infinitude. God is always God and there is no other, not even the gathered saints. Believers in Christ share in the glory of God as a flower reflects the glory of the sun. The flower never becomes a sun.

Yes the corporate church comes to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ but Christians are never infinite. Yes the church is united with Christ in spiritual union but Christians are never God; their life (though eternal) is always derived and never self-existent.

The grace of God in the church is truly amazing but Christians never become God; they are sons of God by adoption, but they cannot share in the attributes of God.

No human being, except Christ, can contain the fulness of God.

Conclusion

This is what makes Christianity different from every other religion. It proclaims that Christ is the fulness of God in a man and that believers are complete in Him. No other religion is this audacious in its claims.

God had to become man in order to procure the work of salvation. God's decree was that the eternal Son would be incarnated as a man having the fulness of divinity in his person but taking on real human nature. Only a real man could die in the place of men; the death of an angel or another created being could not provide atonement for human beings.

³⁴ Eadie, Eph, op. cit. p113.

³⁵ Phil 3:18-19, 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame -- who set their mind on earthly things'.

Thus Jesus could die as a man for human sins in our place, but also the infinitude of his person meant that the value of his blood could cover an infinite number of people.

Whatever the complexities and mysteries regarding the two natures of Christ, we can easily stick to simple and clear Biblical statements. In the verses studied we can see that, unequivocally, Christ the man is the fulness of the Godhead in bodily form.

Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh. 1 Tim 3:16

Unless Christ be the real Son of God, man is not firmly united to God: For what a mere man has received may be lost, as was the case with Adam. Therefore, that grace and gift might remain firm, God assumed our nature; that thereby all spiritual good might be delivered to us in firm possession.

Athanasius, Orations, 3.

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