

The Fullness of God in Him, Part 2

Colossians 1:15-20

Please turn in your bibles to that first chapter of Colossians.

There is a word of greeting from the apostle Paul. This is a church, by the way that he didn't start. It was actually one of his dear disciples that he evangelized that went and started the church in Colossae, all the churches in the Lycus valley like Laodicea, all through the Lycus valley, those churches were started by a man named Epaphras. Paul had never visited there and yet he wrote this letter because of great concern.

There's an opening section of greeting and then he gets right into a prayer report to speak of how he gives thanks for them. In the opening section there, verses 9-14, Paul describes his prayers of gratitude for this church. Reveals how he has been praying for them with specifics and in verse 11, if you'll look there, he blesses them he says, "May you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the father who has

qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Stop there, what is, what is “the inheritance of the saints in light?” It’s God; God is the inheritance of the saints. The saints inherit not mere riches and treasures, not power and influence, not even merely the heavens and the earth. Oh that’s all way too small. The saints, they inherit the maker of all that is. Amazing.

Look at verse 13, this God our inheritance, he is the one who “has delivered us from the domain of darkness.” He’s, “transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Look, to know this God, to receive him as your inheritance, one must first be reconciled to him. One must first have his sins forgiven, completely taken away, so that the slate is wiped clean.

Not only that, but we must not just be innocent or spotless before God, but also we must be perfect before God. That is we

must fulfill all righteousness. Having fulfilled his perfect law, having perfectly conformed to his holiness. Impossible, you say, and you're right about that. How am I, filled with sin, going to be, have all my sins, how can I purge myself of all my sins? How can I completely fulfill a law that I've already broken? No one but God can conform to the holiness of God.

But that's the good news for these Colossian saints. The Gospel for them and for all of us is that what we cannot do, what is impossible for us, is possible with God. For God has accomplished this through his beloved Son. Incarnate in Jesus Christ, in Christ is our only hope. And now the problem for the Colossians, there are a number of influences from the surrounding culture that were distracting them from their devotion and simplicity of knowing and loving and worshipping Jesus Christ.

It's not, like, unlike our own day. So many, many distractions in their world as there are in ours. And Paul wants these Colossians and he would have you and me as well beloved to refocus, to remove all distraction, to power down everything in

your life that's trying to get in to your head, and devote ourselves instead to knowing and loving and worshiping Jesus Christ and him alone.

Sort of recapture their attention, to reset their focus, Paul writes the following words, look at verse 15. "He," that is the one in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins, "he is the image of the invisible God," he is, "the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authority, all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

The Son of God, he set the stage by creating the world, verses 15-17, then he redeemed the world in verses 18-20. After

it had fallen into sin and corruption, that's our second point. Christ the redeemer, the glory of God revealed in Christ the Redeemer. That's our second point, the glory of God revealed in Christ the Redeemer. The Son of God glorified God the Father by redeeming the church and by reconciling to God all things. And here we should add the word fully glorified, completely glorified. That is that Christ fully glorified God, he completely glorified God by redeeming the church.

When he created the universe and all things in it, he was just getting started. Here is where he completes it. Here is where he fulfills it. He redeems the church and reconciles all things into proper relationship with God. Paul introduces the thought in verse 18, first sentence, he is the head of the body the church. Grammatically that kind of stands out in the Greek text because it's the central thought about the supremacy of the Son of God. It's the turning point of this text, it's the, the crux of the matter, it's the crucial point the hinge upon which all depends. That is he could not reveal God's glory to us apart from creation and he couldn't reveal the fullness of God's glory apart from redemption.

And Beloved this is something for us to behold. God's eternal power and his divine nature have been clearly perceived in creation through what has been made. But it's the mercy of God, it's his kindness to fallen sinners, it's his love and his grace, it's his compassion and his tenderness, those are the attributes that he waited to send Christ into the world to reveal fully and complete the fullness of God's glory. Out in the mass of fallen condemned humanity God has seen fit to redeem a people for his own possession. And Paul calls those people the church in verse 18. They are a people for whom Titus 2:14 says Jesus Christ gave himself to redeem them from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession and who are zealous for good works.

This people for his possession Paul has called this people the body, the church here in verse 18. So we see the glory of Christ and thus we see the full glory of God the Father in two ways. That Christ is the head of the body, he is head of the church, body and church, same people, two ways of looking at it. First that Christ is head of the body, the body here is a metaphor that speaks of organic connection. Just as your head is

attached to your body and you really want to keep that connection, same way here.

When glorifying God in creation there remained a creator, creature distinction. He didn't enter into it like he does in redemption. When glorifying God in redemption the Son of God entered into that work. The Son of God took on flesh. He entered into his creation through the tender womb of the virgin Mary. To become a tender baby, helpless, dependent, laid in a manger. Then he grew up to become the head of the body of a redeemed people.

The word head in the New Testament primarily speaks of authority. Where the head goes the body will follow. What the head decides to do, like produce good works, the body is going to perform. So Christ is here pictured the leader of this body, the head of the body, the authority that directs the body according to his perfect will.

There's a second way of looking at this people. Christ is the head not just of the body, but of the church, the church. In Greek the word church is the word *ekklesia*, and it's constructed out of a preposition, *ek*, which means out of and the verb *kaleo*, to call. So, literally to call out of. So these are, the church, are the called out ones. There are many assemblies, in, before the New Testament. Assemblies that were political. Assemblies that were according to trades, and guilds and things like that. There were sports assemblies and all the rest just like we have today.

So this is a word that's in common usage as a specific assembly which has certain characteristics. Certain reason that they're gathered together. So this word *ekklesia* refers to an assembly that's called out of the mass of condemned humanity. It is an assembly that is united together by divine grace in redemption. It's united by the Holy Spirit in union with Christ and called out of that mass for a special purpose.

Peter puts it this way, 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own



possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.” Christ is the head of that assembly. He is the head of that people. He is the sole authority over the church, and why wouldn’t he be.

As verse 18 continues we see that he is the church’s beginning. He is the first born from the dead, and I’ll tell you folks this is the most costly Christmas gift ever given. Because it was purchased at the expense of the life of Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem, he was laid gently and tenderly in a manger, he was wrapped in swaddling cloths, but he died in Jerusalem. He was nailed brutally to a cross and he was wrapped in grave cloths and laid in a tomb. This perfect image of God, this first born, he was born to die. Christ, the all perfect, all sufficient, sacrifice for the sins of his people the church. As it says in Isaiah 53:10, it was the will of the Lord, Yahweh, to crush him. He has put him to grief.

So like a pascal lamb, raised from its birth to be without spot or defect without blemish, without stain, in order that it might be slaughtered in sacrifice to provide a temporary

atonement for the offeror. So Christ was raised by God to be the lamb of God, slain for the sins of his people, sacrificed for the church. God accepted that perfect sacrifice.

He laid himself down, he died on the cross. He was laid in a tomb and then God demonstrated his approval of that sacrifice, that it was indeed acceptable. He raised Jesus up from the dead. Proclaiming forever: Yes, I accept you my beloved. We've all heard that in the most famous of bible verses, John 3:16, "For God so," or thus, "loved the world," loving the world in this way, "that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Those who die with Christ to sin and to self, they are the ones who will share in the resurrection life that Jesus has, that Jesus possesses, and that he gives freely to all who believe. For them Jesus Christ is, verse 18, he is the beginning, he is the first born from the dead. That word first born again, *prototokos*, just like we saw back in verse 15, there he was first born in the sense of honor and preeminence by virtue of creating all created things. But here Christ is first

born as the first one, the forerunner and the progenitor of a new humanity. That's why he is called the beginning. It's the word *arche*.

Over in the second volume written by Luke the evangelist, Acts 1:1, Luke summarized there the content of his entire first volume. The Gospel of Luke, and he says it this way, here's the summary, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach." Began? That's a lot of stuff. "Began to do and teach." Very important to keep in mind. The Gospel of Luke along with all the other Gospels, Matthew, Mark and John, they're merely the beginning. They record what Jesus began to do. All his miracles, all his mercy, all his compassion, and what Jesus began to teach: The Sermon on the Mount, his parables. Jesus is the beginning of a new humanity.

Which is why Paul calls him elsewhere the last Adam. The first creation suffered bondage to corruption because of the failure of the first Adam. But the second creation enjoys the victory of the last Adam. Which is why it is written the first man became a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving

spirit. If anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. So Jesus Christ, this babe born in Bethlehem who died on Calvary's cross, he's the progenitor of a brand new humanity. Behold the old is passing away. The old humanity, dead in the sin of Adam is going to die off. They who remain in Adam, they who remain in their sin and corruption, they who remain doing what they want to do, willingly enslaved to their sins, they will all perish in everlasting fire.

But, behold all things are being made new. And this new humanity, for all who repent and believe the Gospel, they are united to Christ, they're alive forevermore, that's the Gospel. Paul wrote about that Gospel summarizing its essence in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and then he appeared to many." That's the true hope of Christmas. Yes, it's about the birth of the Son of God, the incarnation as he's robed in true humanity. Yes the hope of Christmas is in the unparalleled righteousness of Jesus Christ as he fulfilled all the law of God in perfect submission and without sin. But all those truths would be meaningless to us, would fall on deaf ears, hard hearts, would

meet blind eyes, if it weren't for the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. He came to die, that we would have life.

God accepted that perfect sacrifice, demonstrating his full approval, raising him from the dead, that all who believe in Christ would likewise follow him in resurrection life. We know Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:14, that "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." So Christ is the first born. He's the *prototokos* in creation and now also in redemption he is the *prototokos*. He is the first born, he is preeminent, verse 18, "In order that in everything he might be preeminent."

You know what God keeps doing here in this text? It's what he does throughout all of scripture, he keeps pointing us to Jesus Christ. Look at him. Look carefully at him. Meditate on Christ, why? Look at verse 19, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." That's why. Would you spurn God's gift to you by looking elsewhere? Would you spurn God's gift to you by looking at trinkets, trifles, trivialities? Again back to the joy of Christmas. God is pleased to glorify himself by

creating the world in, through and for his son. But he's pleased to demonstrate the fullness of his glory by redeeming the church in Christ. In Christ the fullness of God's glory is made complete, it's made perfect. Showing his compassion for sinners, his love for his people, his grace to save them.

We started by asking why worship this baby? Why do angels and men bow down at the feet of a mere baby? Why worship this man? Because beloved, Jesus Christ is God's gift for us at Christmas. His own beloved son is the gift that he gave to you and to me. Will you turn from your sins? Will you look to Christ? Will you look upon him, meditate, reflect and believe in him for eternal life? You should, you know why? Because verse 20, look at it, God has chosen through Christ, he's chosen to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven. Well, what does that mean? Does this mean that everyone will ultimately be saved? Even those who reject his word? Even those who spurn his grace? Even those who live exactly as they want to live indulging in their disobedience, making all their excuses?

Is Paul teaching Universalism here? The eventual salvation of the entire human race without exception? No, not at all. Not at all. Because if that were the case then we would need to include in the "all things, whether in heaven or on earth" we'd need to put all things demonic too, wouldn't we? That would be consistent but we know from scripture that "Satan and all who follow him will be thrown alive in the lake of fire that burns with sulfur," Revelation 19:20. Those who remain devoted to their sins, according the Revelation 21:8, that is "the cowardly, the faithless," you say unbelieving, "the detestable, the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

You think that dying here and now, as terrifying as that is, the process is to many of us, you think that's the problem? That's not the problem, this is just the first death. The second death is the death that never dies. The second death is the death in the lake of fire. Living forever in torment. No, there will be people who go there. Reconciling to himself all things, that does not mean universal salvation. But the truth expressed here, it's a sobering reality, it's one that gives a word of

warning here at the end of the text as we think about those who ignore God's gift of Christ at Christmas, but it is at the same time a warning to those who are living and that means it's a gracious warning. This is grace from God.

For those who do not believe, for those who refuse to repent, that is a situation that cannot remain in perpetuity. That is a situation that God will not abide. He is going to bring all things into right relationship to himself, whether in grace or in judgment. He's eventually going to call a stop to it all. To rebel against the gracious creator and sustainer of the universe, God will not allow it. His justice, it must be satisfied, otherwise if it's not satisfied and he winks at sin or he lets things pass without it being punished fully and completely, well then he forfeits the attribute of justice. Do you want a judge like that in your court room? Do you want a judge like that who's going to let some things go, because he's a nice guy? No, we demand justice from a judge, that's what makes him a just judge.



Should we expect any less of the judge of all the earth who will do what's right? The rebellion of fallen humanity that's a wrong that must be made right, which is in its essence a kind of reconciliation, that is to make things right, to put things into proper reckoning. It's like reconciling a financial account that's been out of order for far too long. And God will in Christ reconcile all things to himself. Even to those who do not bow the knee in worship. He will make them bow. Same truth we find in Philippians 2:9-11 Paul says, "God has highly exalted Jesus Christ and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." That's reconciliation folks.

For those of us who repent and believe, for those of us who belong to Christ's body to his elect church we're reconciled to God by his amazing grace. He initiated, he saved us, not by works that we had done, but by his mercy he saved us. Through Christ we have peace by the blood of his cross, verse 20. We're reconciled because he has turned us from enemies into friends and we now bow not because we're forced to bow, but because we

long to bow. We rejoice to bow before him and worship. You think those angels were compelled, by some external force, to proclaim glory to God in the highest? No. They rejoiced and so too do all who have been saved by his grace.

But for those who refuse to bow, for those who remain fixed in their pride and their self-centeredness and their love for sin, they will be made to bow one day. They will be crushed beneath his rod of iron. And so friends this Christmas we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Bow before him. If you are already reconciled to God implore others on behalf of Christ to do the same as you've done, if it's good for you why isn't it good for the entire world. That's what Christmas is about, the fullness of God in Christ. God was pleased to make all his fullness known in him. He's the one who created the world. He's the one who completed the glory of God by redeeming a people for his own possession. Bow with me before him now in a word of worship and prayer.

Our eternal God and heavenly Father, you are infinite, perfect, immortal, invisible, the only wise God and we come

before you on this Christmas eve on Sunday to worship you here on the Lord's day. The day that we remember and worship because this is the day that you resurrected Jesus Christ from the dead. You demonstrated your approval of his sacrifice for our sins, the sins of all who believe. We thank you for accepting that sacrifice as you must because he is the perfect one, he is the one you ordained, he is the one you decreed, and in him you have decreed all of us who believe. We give ourselves wholly and fully to you thanking you once again as we draw near to this tender time of Christmas celebration remembering the birth of Jesus Christ.