

Complete in Christ – Don't Be Carried Away

Colossians 2:6-10

⁶As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

⁸Beware 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. ⁹For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone, whose body language says the opposite of what he or she says with his or her lips? You ask her, "Are you nervous?" And she says, "Nervous? Me? No, why?" In the meantime she is biting her nails, fidgeting, looking all over, and moving restlessly. What she says with her mouth does not seem to match her actions.

When you look at the church at large, something similar happens. You ask, "Do you believe that you are complete in Christ?" And Christians say with their mouths, "Oh, yes." But look at their lives, and it seems like the opposite is true. They are filled with nervous, frantic, ceaseless busyness; they are restless; they are going from one thing to the other, never finding contentment, peace. And as they do so, their lives become more and more complicated.

There was a time when the two things that a Christian felt he needed were a Bible and a hymnbook. It seems the modern Christian needs so much more to make his or her Christian life work. Now we need Christian self-help books, we need Christian camps where we can go away and heal our broken memories, we need Christian psychologists to help us find mental stability; we even need medications to calm us, sedate us, and even make us happy. We need celebrity pastors, whose books we gobble up, and sermons we devour, going from one to the other. We go to hear this international speaker who has flown in. We need tons of Bible study tools, aids, helps, and resources; we need the latest Christian music. And all this on top of the frenetic lifestyle which the everyday stresses of life place upon us.

In spite of all this, modern Christians are plagued by panic attacks, stress-related health problems, depression, insecurity, continual worry and anxiety, fear and frustration. Christian marriages are ending in divorce. Christians are failing to be salt and light in the workplace, in society.

For a people who claim to be complete in Christ, we seem awfully like people who are still searching. And when we don't find, we add more options, and try more things. It seems our Christian life is very complicated, very busy, very cluttered, and very unsatisfying. It would puzzle the modern Christian if we told him that all he really needs to successfully live the Christian life is a Bible and a hymnbook.

I think that's true of church services too. It seems simple won't do anymore. To sing a few hymns with profound meaning, to pray sincerely, to read the Scriptures, to have the Word expounded is seen as not enough. Churches need big bands, with performers singing to us and allegedly helping us to sing; big Powerpoint displays before the service; children walking on with banners; dance demonstrations; celebrity testimonies; special-effects systems that can produce smoke, fire, sparks, and laser lights in the auditorium; and big bang sermons dealing with me, myself, I, my world. We need boatloads of ministries, to fill up entire pages of small print on the church bulletin.

Go back not more than 150 years and try to find how many organised ministries the average church would have. The ministry was God's people ministering to each other all week. But open the church bulletin of an average church today - Nursery, Pre-school ministries, primary school ministries, youth ministries, school-leavers' ministries, twenties' ministries, singles' ministries, young couples' ministries, ladies' ministries, mens' ministries, divorcees' ministries, widows' ministries, elderly ministries, sports' ministries, businessmen ministries, addiction recovery ministries, bikers'

ministries, 4x4 outdoors 'roughing it' ministries.

This is perhaps an extreme example, but I went onto the website of one of the bigger churches in the States, onto their ministries link. I counted 128 ministries that the church offers. Compare that to the description of a church by Justin Martyr in the year 150 A.D:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the [writings] of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the [pastor] verbally instructs, and [encourages] to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the [pastor] in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen;

It seems almost primitive by comparison. The question is – were they primitive, or has our modern church lost the simplicity we were supposed to have? Were they too simple, or are we too complex? I think you can defend the older simplicity using the Scriptures; I think you would have a hard time defending our modern complexity.

Why are we so busy; so frantic, so restless?

The short answer is this: *if you do not believe that Christ is sufficient, you will seek substitutes.* And because they will never satisfy, you will keep adding and seeking, and adding and seeking, more and more substitutes for the completeness that is already yours in Christ.

The answer lies in not paying lip-service to the idea of being complete in Christ, but truly understanding it and believing it. Once you truly understand it, it must in turn affect your behaviour. Churches would be utterly transformed, from nurseries to keep the 'saintlings' entertained, into houses of simple but profound worship, if Christians went deep with the Word of God to find out why Christ is sufficient.

That is the promise of this passage of Scripture. It is perhaps the centre of Colossians.

If you'll allow me, I want to work through this passage backwards. Verse 9 and 10 give us the basis of our completeness in Christ. Verses 6 through 8 give us the applications of those truths to our lives. So let's begin by unpacking verse 9. Verse 9 is a very theological verse, so bear with me as we take it apart to understand it.

1. Jesus is the Fullness of the Godhead

Verse 9 gives us the basis of the whole book. In Jesus, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. Now what does that mean?

The word **Godhead** is a Word which emphasises Deity. It emphasises all the qualities, properties and attributes of God.

We are told '*all the fullness of the Divine nature dwells in Jesus bodily.*'

The word translated **fullness** is the word *pleroma*. The false teachers enjoyed using that term for their false system of belief. They said the Pleroma was the original, holy god, who created other, lesser gods, or emanations, spilling a bit of himself into them, They created others. The false teachers said that Jesus was one of the creations of the Pleroma. But Paul says, 'In Jesus **all** the fullness, the entire pleroma of the Divine Nature dwells bodily.'

He is saying *all that there is of the Divine Nature, all his properties, attributes and qualities dwells in Jesus bodily.*

The word **dwell** means 'to be at home in'. This fullness is not something which rested on Jesus temporarily. All the fullness of God's nature is completely and utterly at home in Him. He is not pretending to be God. He is God, the Divine Nature is at home in Jesus; it belongs there.

The word **bodily** refers to Jesus' taking of humanity into Himself. Jesus was always God, but Jesus was not always Man. At one time, He took humanity up into Himself.

So, here is a paraphrase. In Jesus, all of God's nature, properties, and attributes are at home. He is now the God-Man.

II. You are Filled Up in His Fullness

If Jesus is the absolute fullness of God, and He is now the bridge between God and man, what will happen when a human is filled with Him?

Answer: You are complete in Him.

Please notice, this is not a command, something you must still do. There is no condition attached to it – so that it is only true if you do something. It is not a question. It is a statement of fact - you who are in Christ – you are complete. You are complete in Him. If you have trusted Christ, you are hidden in the massive person of Christ. When God looks at you, He looks at Christ; and you in Him. You are in Christ, and as verse 6 tells us, Christ is in you.

Here is the amazing thing – the word for complete is another form of the word 'pleroma'. Jesus is the pleroma, the fullness of God, and you are filled up to **full** in Him.

Jesus holds all that God is, and only Jesus can do that. No human can ever hold all that God is. You or I can never do that. But when Jesus is in us, and we are in Him, we are filled up to the full. It is like a bottle and the ocean. The ocean can hold all of a bottle, but a bottle cannot hold all of the ocean. But the ocean can easily fill up a bottle. So you and I, when in Christ are filled up to the full.

What makes a human, made in God's image, complete? When they are filled with money? When they are filled with popularity? When they are filled with knowledge? When they are filled with power? When they are filled with pleasures?

The only way humans, made in the image of God, will ever be complete, is when they are restored to look like the one in whose image they were made.

You see, Jesus is the Perfect Man. Jesus is what humanity is when complete, when full, when perfect.

So to be in Christ is to be everything you are supposed to be, lacking and needing nothing.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 *But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- ³¹ that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."*

The Bible calls Him life, food, root, clothing, head, hope, righteousness, refuge, light, life, peace, Passover, portion, substitute, freedom, fountain, wisdom, standard, way, example, door, dew, sun, shield, reward, strength, song, sanctification, supplier, resurrection, redemption, teacher, ladder, shepherd, friend, truth, treasure, temple, ark, altar and more

John 1:16 *And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.*

Now someone may say - “I hear what you say about Christ being the fullness of God. And I hear what you say about being complete in Christ. But to be honest, I don't feel that way. And I don't live that way! How do I tap into this fullness? How do I become aware of, and live with the sense of my completion in Christ?”

That's a good and honest observation. The answer is in verse 6. The Christian life is by faith. You became a Christian by simple faith in Christ. By faith you believed that Jesus would be your salvation, that Jesus would be your forgiveness, that Jesus would be your righteousness. And you took it by faith, which means you regarded it as a truth. The Bible says that when you did that, you were born again. And the guilt began to recede, and the fear of hell began to recede, and the fear of death began to recede, because by faith you took God at His Word regarding who Jesus would be for you.

Well, do you know that you live the Christian life the same way you got it? Verse 6 tells us that. When you realise there is some sin, some wrong, something lacking, you repent of it (where it is a sin) and you come to Christ for His sufficiency.

When you think about it, doesn't every sin at its heart have the belief that ‘I am not complete and I need something else.’ Envy says someone else has what I need to be complete. Covetousness lusts after the things it wants to be complete. Lust desires another to feel complete. Murmuring is our complaint, when we believe we are not complete. Boasting desires the praise of others to make us feel complete. Bitterness feels injustice and believes it will never be complete until that ‘other’ person is punished.

Pride, which is at the root of all sin, says – ‘God, you and your Son, and your Spirit, and your Ways are not what I need to be fulfilled. I will do it my way, I will find satisfaction elsewhere.’

Whether it is worry, whether it is insecurity, whether it is sinful lust, whether it is discontent, whether it is the love of money, whether it is being indifferent to others, whether it is depression, whether it is a marriage problem – there is something Christ has promised you, which is yours in Him. It may be the promise of provision to cure worry, promise of the beauty of purity to conquer lust, promise of a glorious hope to conquer depression, promise of infinite resources and eternal inheritances to conquer the love of money, promise of fullness of joy to conquer selfishness. And you count it to be true of yourself, because He says it is. You take by faith what He said is true of you once you are saved.

You become what you are. You know you have this completeness in Christ, in position; so you believe it by faith until it becomes evident in your practice. And just as your faith at salvation brought real results to your heart, the one who believes in Christ's sufficiency for them by faith will see real results – the discontent goes out; the gratitude comes in; the murmuring leaves; the depression leaves; the burning lust, the envy, the coveting evaporate, as the sweeter and better promises of Jesus Christ remind us – *if I have Christ, I have more than enough* (Heb 13:5)

For everything in your life, there is something Christ has promised to be for you; and do for you. There are promises for parents, promises for marriage, promises for singles, promises for finances, promises for speech, promises for sexual purity, promises for children, promises for old age, promises for ministry, promises for evangelism, promises for forgiveness, promises for recovering from abuse, promises for shame.

If there was one area of human existence for which Christ did not have a promise to more than meet the need – then verse 10 would not be true. You would not be complete **in** Him, and you would have to go **outside of** Him to meet that particular need.

How can I know what he has promised to be and do for me? That is one of the reasons the Bible was written – to record the hundreds of ways He completes us and provides grace for every conceivable condition, situation and circumstance. If we do not know those promises, we are robbing ourselves of great riches.

But that is not to say you will know these promises overnight.

Verse 7 tracks the way this walking in Christ by faith happens:

You are first **rooted** in Him – which is past tense – referring to salvation.

Then you **build** upon that foundation. Adding one brick after another, learning more and more of how Christ is all in all. As you approach a new situation, that you haven't faced before – you run to Christ, and search His Word to find out – how are you my completion here? And you take it by faith, and add another brick to the structure of your faith.

That leads you to be **established** in the faith. You increasingly are made firm, secure. The winds of doubt, anxiety, depression, do not quickly roll into your life any more. Your structure is becoming so built on all Christ is for you, your life is becoming a solid structure – a testimony to Christ's sufficiency.

And when someone is found so rooted and built up and established in Christ, they are **abounding** in what? **Thanksgiving**.

What does the Psalmist say will happen to the man who spends his time meditating on the Word of God day and night? The one who continually seeks to know how God's grace supplies what is needed in every situation?

Psalm 1:3 *He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.*

III. Do not be Tricked into any Teachings which Suggest you Need Something more Than Christ.

In verse 8, building upon Christ's sufficiency, and the simplicity of living by faith in Him, Paul says 'Don't be cheated by philosophy and vain deceit.' The word for 'cheated' literally means, 'to be captured' It has the idea of a false teacher, who comes along and captivates minds and steals them away from the truth. Paul calls these false teachings by strong terms 'vain deceit' – empty, baseless trickery. Philosophy just refers to any theory of reality, ideas about life, God, the world, ourselves. The problem is not with philosophy, the problem is where it comes from. The Bible says the kind that deceives comes from traditions of men. It does not come from God. It is a collection of old ideas, recycled and handed down. They also come from the elements of this world.

But the problem with these teachings, is they are not according to Christ. They are, what we called in a recent sermon, 'Jesus-plus'. They are add-ons, substitutes, extras that you are told you must have to be really complete and happy.

Materialism tells you that you need the latest and most stylish clothes, shoes, makeup, jewelry, cologne, hairstyle, car, cell-phone, furniture, sound system, to be really happy. Almost every advertisement you will ever see says – you are not complete, until you have this.

'Self-esteemism' tells you that you must consciously congratulate yourself, praise yourself, thank yourself, forgive yourself, honour yourself to be really happy. Self-love, they tell you, is what you

need to love others. You are not whole, you are not complete – they tell you, unless you have a 'healthy self-esteem'. The word healthy here is suggesting you are sick if you don't have it.

Philippians 2:4 *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

'Scientism' tells you that the only true things in the world are the things which scientists have discovered, everything else is a fairy tale. Everything else is just personal feelings. The scientists have the facts, but no one has the Truth. So if you really want to be complete, you cannot trust Christ alone, you must trust the various scientists.

1 Timothy 6:20 *... avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.*

What about 'Oprahism' which tells us that each of us is really a profoundly good person, heading for eternal good, no matter what religion we are of. Just believe in yourself, and don't tell others what they must believe.

I'm sure we could list many others. The point is, if you believe Christ is your sufficiency, you won't be swept away by materialism, or pop psychology, or false science, or humanism, or new ageism. People who are full do not scavenge for leftovers. Satisfied Christians are not looking for something else to fill the gap.

But maybe it is from inside the church that the 'Jesus-plus' calls come. They tell us we need to have a second blessing to be complete, we need to speak in tongues, we need to perform certain works, we need to experience certain mystical experiences, we need to have attended a particular church, or listened to a certain preacher, or have been to a particular country, or take part in Jewish festivals and feasts to be complete in Christ.

And the answer to that is – 'No – the Christ I received, is the Christ I will walk in. He was more than enough for me at salvation, He Himself is more than enough for me in sanctification. The way we received Him, is the way we walk in Him.

But the command is 'See that no one does this'. In other words, beware. Be careful. There are thousands of voices, vying for your attention, calling for you to drift into some kind of Jesus-plus philosophy, some kind of substitute.

Matthew 7:15 *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*

Look out for them. But, probably more importantly, keep a watch on yourself. When you spot some kind of insufficiency, go to Christ. Don't let it fester. It is people who have not truly meditated on the sufficiency of Jesus, that are prey for cults, false teachers and deceitful philosophy.

He is the fullness of God; you are filled up in Him. Walk in Him the way you received Him, growing in your walk with Him.

The reason the ancient Christians, and even Christians of a little over 100 years ago, had such a simple faith and a simple life, was because they were more aware of a sufficient Christ. When you know you are complete in him, do you need religious entertainments? Do you need self-esteem books? Do you need all kinds of gimmicks and gadgets and religious stuff to keep people coming and happy and satisfied? No. The all-sufficiency of Jesus makes life blessedly simple. When life is looking rather cluttered up and over-complicated – do an inventory. Start asking – how much of this do I need? Are some, or any, or many, of these things substitutes for something Christ has already

promised Me in Himself?

Have I been practising a two-stage Christianity – faith at salvation, but works for the rest of it?
Have you lost the day-to-day action of simple faith in Christ?

John MacArthur: “Homer and Langley Collier were sons of a respected New York doctor. Both had earned college degrees. Homer had studied at Columbia University to be an attorney. When old Dr. Collier died in the early part of the century, his two sons inherited the family mansion and estate in New York. The two were both bachelors and financially secure because the father had made a lot of money. They chose a strange lifestyle, not consistent with the material status their inheritance gave them. They received a fortune. They lived in seclusion, boarded up the widows and padlocked the doors of the great house. All the utilities, including the water, were shut off. No one was seen coming and going from the house. It appeared empty.

In March 21, 1947, police received an anonymous telephone tip that a man had died inside the boarded-up house. It had been boarded up for many years. Unable to force their way into the front door, the authorities entered through a second-story window. Inside they found Homer’s corpse on a bed. He had died clutching the February 22, 1920 issue of the Jewish Morning Journal though he had been totally blind for years. This macabre scene was set up against an equally grotesque backdrop. The brothers, for decades, had been collecting junk. The house was crammed full of broken machinery, auto parts, boxes, appliances, folding chairs, musical instruments, rags, assorted odds and ends and bundles of old newspapers, all of it which was completely worthless. They were what we now call obsessive hoarders. An enormous mountain of debris blocked the front door. Investigators were forced to continue to use the upstairs’ windows for weeks while excavators worked to clear a path to the door.

Nearly three weeks later, as workman were still hauling heaps of refuse away, someone made a grizzly discovery. Langley’s body was found, buried beneath a pile of rubbish six feet away from where Homer died. Langley had been crushed to death in a crude booby trap he had built to protect his junk from thieves. Eventually the authorities in New York took out 140 tons of garbage.”

When I read that, I thought, Homer and Langley make a sad but fitting parable of the way many Christian people live. They have an inheritance in Jesus Christ that is sufficient for all their needs and they live in unnecessary self-imposed deprivation, piling up junk and neglecting the abundant resources that are rightfully theirs to enjoy in Christ. Homer and Langley turned their home into a squalid dump. Spurning their father’s great legacy, they lived with trash.”

Christians have the fullness of God as their very life, the living water actually bubbling up inside them, but they live as if they are still thirsty. If that’s you, then make the commitment today to walk in Christ as you received Him, trusting Him for all you need, all the time.

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