

Full In Christ

Colossians 2:6-15 (EHV)

6 Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, 7 by being rooted and built up in him, and strengthened in the faith just as you were taught, while you overflow in faith with thanksgiving. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, which are in accord with human tradition, namely, the basic principles of the world, but not in accord with Christ. 9 For all the fullness of God's being dwells bodily in Christ. 10 And you have been brought to fullness in him. Christ is the head over every ruler and authority. 11 You were also circumcised in him, with a circumcision not done by human hands, in the putting off of the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, 12 when you were buried with Christ in baptism. And in baptism you were also raised with him through the faith worked by the God who raised Christ from the dead. 13 Even when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ by forgiving us all our trespasses. 14 God erased the record of our debt brought against us by his legal demands. This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross. 15 After disarming the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them by triumphing over them in Christ.

At the end of last year, I had a local news reporter who works on the faith section ask me, "What ideas or new year's resolutions might you have for helping people in your faith community to improve their lives? Exercise or weight loss programs? How to manage money?" Now, I am not criticizing the reporter for asking these questions, but the questions did cause me to step back for a moment and think. What do I want for the people who I minister to, the people who come to Light of the Valley, for you?

My honest thoughts in response to his questions? I think it's kind of shallow and even unbecoming of the office of the pastor if my main goals for 2020 were to help you come up with a physical exercise program to help you lose weight or to tell you how to manage your money. These are good things for us to do as stewards of God's gifts including our health and money, but I'm not the expert in these fields and weight loss and money management was not what you called me as your pastor to do for you. I'll leave that to the local gym's sending out their new year's promotions and Dave Ramsey and his Financial Peace University. Also, I recognize that these are temporary goals with limited impact. One day you will not have to manage your weight or your finances because, God-willing, you'll be in heaven.

What, then, are my goals as your faith leader in 2020. And it's the same goal I had in 2019 and the year before that and every year. I want you to be filled with Christ. I want this for you because Christ impacts your life now and forever after.

So, I have to ask: Do you feel full in Christ? Maybe that's kind of a weird question. How do you gauge your fullness level with Christ? I guess maybe what you'd be looking for is whether or not you feel complete in Christ. Do you feel like there is something lacking when it comes to your relationship with God? Do you have a bit of spiritual emptiness, voids in life that leave you wanting and unfulfilled – a prayer unanswered, good deeds that don't seem to be reciprocated, temptations that you can't seem to overcome and you struggle with on a daily basis? You want these things to be in your past and not a present threat. And so you feel that there's something lacking spiritually.

There are plenty of other people who feel a lacking in Christ, that they believe in Christ, they believe that he has helped them, but also that there's still room that needs to be filled. So they suggest that more prayer is needed to fill us or more community service or literal tithing, giving more to charity. Basically, they're telling us that we need something more than what we have in Christ.

The Colossian Christians had the same people saying the same sort of things to them. Although the Apostle Paul does not directly name the false teaching that was trying to creep its way into their church, he did warn them saying, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, which are in accord with human tradition, namely, the basic principles of the world, but not in accord with Christ." (verse 8) It seems that these people were saying that there was something more that was needed than Christ to be spiritually full. You needed some secret wisdom or philosophy, something more than what God's Word in its written form offers. Others seemed to add on top of that the practice of circumcision, that the surgical removal of flesh, was needed to fill you up before God. Basically, Christ is not enough; something extra is needed to fill you up.

What's God's answer to those who tell us that we need to fill ourselves with something more than Christ? "All the fullness of God's being dwells bodily in Christ. And you have been brought to fullness in him. Christ is the head over every ruler and authority." (verses 9-10) Christ is completely God. He is not in any way, shape, or form inferior to or less than God. He did not turn into or become God. He is that being who exists without beginning and without end, the one who has total power over everything, the one

who goes beyond our comprehension. When he was born in Bethlehem, he was 100% God in flesh. When he was baptized by John, he was 100% God in flesh. When he died on the cross, he was 100% God in flesh. As he is today, our ascended Lord, he is still 100% God in flesh. This means that Christ is the complete package as fully God, who was perfect every step of the way, the one who left nothing lacking in regards to fulfilling all righteousness for us, and has power over every ruler and authority. So he is the only being who can completely fill us.

If we do not feel full before God, that's because we are listening to human traditions and other spirits, other ideas, that are working to convince us that Jesus is not enough to fill us up. But Christ is the whole fullness of God dwelling bodily. Being that total package, he took us just as we were and made us into something new, a person full of his life. Paul writes, "You were also circumcised in him, with a circumcision not done by human hands, in the putting off of the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, when you were buried with Christ in baptism. And in baptism you were also raised with him through the faith worked by the God who raised Christ from the dead." (verses 11-12) Christ did something for us that we could never do for ourselves. He put off our body of flesh - our sinful nature, the imperfection that we are born with, and the record of sins that we have committed. He took all that away, cut it off from us. He killed that sinful nature that works against us by drowning it in the waters of baptism. It's gone.

Then, he brought us back to life. He made us new with the same power that raised him from the dead. "Even when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ by forgiving us all our trespasses. God erased the record of our debt brought against us by his legal demands. This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross." (verses 13-14) This is what Christ in all his fullness as God did for us in baptism. In baptism, a new person arises – one who is not controlled by our sinful nature, one without a sinful record attached to it, one who is no longer condemned but forgiven.

This new self powerfully raised to life by God is like as if we were to be looking to start a new diet and exercise program today to find that our body is instantly starting out in peak shape. All our excess body fat is gone, all the blood sugars and cholesterol levels and our A1C are the best they could possibly be. Our muscles are conditioned and stronger than they have ever been. Or it's like we were sitting down to manage our finances better only to find all our debt has already been eliminated, that we have rich surpluses in our emergency funds and our retirement accounts, that we have a perfect credit score. Everything is perfect, nothing is lacking. We are in full health and are financially set. In the same way because of God's gift of baptism, we have been filled with Jesus' perfection. There is nothing lacking, no action, no deed, no secret knowledge. All sins are gone, and we are totally righteous. We are completely full in Christ and full of victory because so was Christ as "after disarming the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them by triumphing over them in Christ." (verse 15)

Being full in Christ, what are we to do now? Just as Paul encouraged the Colossian Christians, we are told, "...continue to walk in him, by being rooted and built up in him, and strengthened in the faith just as you were taught, while you overflow in faith with thanksgiving." (verses 6b-7)

I'm not going to tell you what kind of gym membership you should get, what super foods you should eat, or how to manage your finances. What I will ask of you, though, is to evaluate your spiritual diet and exercise. When it comes to Christ, do you eat like a bird, pecking a little morsel here and there? Do you go a week at a time without working out your faith in Christ, strengthening it? Or do you approach Christ like an all you can eat buffet, that you are trying to get every ounce in to stay completely full because it's so good?

In your walk in Christ, how can you continue to be full in him? Paul says be rooted in him, planted in Christ, having roots that take in nourishment of your faith in Christ, to be locked into the source that keep us full, which is only Jesus – his life, his works, his payment for my sins as fully God. Remember your baptism, what God has done for you in the past to make you what you are today. Be built up in him, Paul says. You usually don't see roots, but you know that they're there. Buildings, though, you can see. This is getting taller, getting bigger in your walk with God. Show your fullness in Christ in how you live, by your actions, sharing Christ and his total forgiveness and total perfection for others. Take in his Supper for the renewal of your faith and your forgiveness. Be established in the faith, just as you were taught, that you continue in what you have learned about Christ and so continue being full in Christ instead of filling up with other philosophies or ideas. Pile on heaping helpings of Christ. Abound in thanksgiving, that you are always thanking Christ for filling you up and making you whole, that there is nothing more that can be added because we are full in Christ.

What does that plan look like? For now, I leave that to you. You are full in Christ, his life, his power, his perfection, his authority. You are full of forgiveness, debt free. You are full of eternal life with God. So, walk in him. Continue to be full in Christ. Amen.