

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: " 'All the Fullness' is in Christ" (Colossians 1:19)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/27/2009

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Introduction

Today in our study of the preeminence of Jesus Christ in the book of Colossians, we've come to chapter one, verse nineteen. Now, if you've been following this series of messages, you may recall that when we came to Colossians 1:15, I mentioned that in the original Greek of the New Testament, verses 15 through 20 are in the form of Greek poetry. Those verses are actually a hymn that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. It explains who Jesus is, and what He has done, what He is doing now, and what He will be doing in the future. As we prepare to focus on verse nineteen today, I want to read the entire passage for you, beginning at verse fifteen:

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

These verses are perhaps the most doctrinally-packed passage about the Lord Jesus Christ in the entire Word of God. They tell us that Jesus Christ is the very image of

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God. He is the Firstborn over all creation. He is the Creator of the universe. He is the Head of the Church. He is the firstborn from among the dead. He is the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in a body. He is the Reconciler of all things.

“All the Fullness”

And today, we focus on verse nineteen. In the King James Bible it reads like this: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.” Now what I want to do is to give you a brief explanation of what this verse means, and then I want to relate it to some practical issues. And those practical issues have to do with the way much of the Evangelical church views the Lord Jesus Christ today. Much of the church today has a diminished view of Christ. A low view of Christ. Much of the church no longer exalts Christ as the person that He truly is. And so I want to focus on the Biblical antidote to that kind of thinking today. But before we do that, let me give you an explanation of this verse from the original language.

For just a moment, I want to skip over the very first word of the verse, and give you a literal translation of the phrase that follows. In our English Bibles, the Old King James and the New King James, it reads like this: “it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.” Now in the original Greek text, the words “the Father” do not appear. Those words are supplied by the context. In the original Greek, the sentence literally reads, “in Him was pleased all the fullness to dwell” – or to put it in our English word order, “all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him.”

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Now, what does that phrase actually mean? "All the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him." The fullness of what? Well, we have an explanation a few verses further down, in Colossians chapter two, verse nine. Paul states it more explicitly there. He says, "In Him [in Jesus] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form." Paul is saying that Jesus Christ is completely and fully God in bodily form.

Now, why would Paul be making such a point of this, that he would say it twice within the space of just a few verses? Well, one of the reasons had to do with a heresy about Jesus that had become popular in the church at Colosse and in the surrounding areas at that time. This heresy was an early form of Gnosticism. And one of the things that it said was that Jesus Christ was not fully God, but that Jesus Christ was merely one of a series of beings that descended from God but were less than God.

The root cause of this heresy was the fact that the people who held to it refused to submit to Scripture alone as the church's authority. They said that you had to have a secret, and supposedly higher knowledge that was above Scripture in order to really understand the Bible. There was a lot of reliance upon mystical experience. And of course all of this was wrong. But the basic place where these people first got off the track was in not believing that Scripture alone is the authoritative Word of God.

So Paul makes such a point of the fact that Jesus Christ is the fullness of the Godhead in a human body, that He is God Himself, because he wants to refute that heresy. And you know, we have versions of that heresy in the church today. We have

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people who think that Jesus was a great philosopher, or a great teacher, or a great moral example, or even a social revolutionary. Or perhaps, as is the case with the false religion of Islam, they think He is just another one of the prophets. But Paul is making it clear that Jesus Christ is God Himself, and nothing less.

A Small But Vital Word

Now, I told you a few moments ago that I was going to skip over the first word of Colossians chapter one, verse nineteen. But now I want to come back to it, because it's a very important word.

Notice that verse nineteen begins with the word "for." It's a Greek word that could also be translated "because" – or, "because of the following." In other words, Paul is saying this: The things that I've been telling you in the last few verses about the Lord Jesus Christ – the fact that he is the very image of God; the fact that He is the Firstborn over all creation; that fact that He is the Creator of the universe; the fact that He is the Originator and the Head of the Church; the fact that He is the firstborn from among the dead – all of these things are true, because of what I am about to tell you. All of these things are true, Paul says, because "all the fullness [of God] was pleased to dwell in Him." All of these things are true, because Jesus Christ is God Himself, come to earth in human flesh. He is fully God, and fully man, at the same time.

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Evangelical Preaching Today: Christ Diminished

Now that I've given you a brief exposition of this verse, I now want to relate it to some practical matters in the church today. The first is this: There is a tendency in much of contemporary preaching to over-emphasize Jesus' humanity to the point of dangerously diminishing or even denying His deity.

Let me tell you the kind of thinking that this kind of preaching produces. A friend of this ministry was telling me that her doctor – who professes to be a born-again Christian, a man who goes to an Evangelical church – this man told her that his perception of Jesus is that Jesus would be the kind of guy you could sit down and have a drink with at the local bar. And I'm sorry to say that this is just one of many examples of how people in Evangelical churches today think about Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, God forbid that you should ever think that way about the Lord of Glory, the Creator of the Universe, the Christ of the Cross. Much of the Evangelical church today is preaching what Paul, in Second Corinthians called "another Jesus" – a "Jesus" who is not the God of the Bible. He is a caricature of God, invented in the sinful heart of man. Jesus was — and is — both fully God and fully man.

You need to be sure that you understand what happened when Jesus Christ came into the world as a baby born in Bethlehem, two thousand years ago. The passage that is the key to that understanding is Philippians chapter two, verses five through eleven, where Paul writes this:

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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. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 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.

Notice those words, “being in the form of God” and “taking the form of a bondservant.” The meaning of these words in the original language is vital to the proper understanding of the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. When the Apostle Paul under divine inspiration speaks of Jesus as "being in the form of God" and "taking the form of a bondservant," he is using a Greek word which means that Jesus *possessed an outward appearance that was in agreement with His inward nature*. In other words, what you see is what you get — the outside agrees with what is on the inside.

Fully God in Human Flesh

When Paul says that Jesus Christ was “in the form of God” it tells us two things. First, of all, it tells us that Jesus' deity is the outward expression of His true inward

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nature. And secondly, the verb form used that is used in Philippians two tells us that Jesus' deity is a continuous state — past, present, and future. It is something that had no beginning, has no ending, and always continues in a steady state. In other words, Jesus did not empty Himself of, or in any way diminish, His deity when He came into this world in a body of flesh. In taking on the form of a servant, Jesus voluntarily laid aside heavenly privileges in obedience to God the Father, but His deity was not changed or diminished. Jesus was still the God of the universe while He was in this world.

The Suffering Servant

And when Paul says, in Philippians chapter two, verse seven that Jesus took on "the form of a bondservant," this is in complete harmony with His deity. Servanthood was also a true outward expression of Jesus' inward nature as God. His deity remained fully intact when Jesus took on the form of a servant. Humanity was the means by which He manifested and demonstrated His servanthood. In John 6:38 and 39 Jesus said this:

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

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And in Matthew 20:28, Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus is the Suffering Servant spoken of in Isaiah 52:13 — "Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high" — and onward through chapter 53, culminating in verse 11: "My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."

So Philippians chapter two, verses five through eleven underscore what Paul is saying in Colossians chapter one, verse nineteen. Jesus' deity and His servanthood both reflect His true nature as God. His outward appearance changed, but His inner nature did not. Jesus was — and is — both fully God and fully man at the same time. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.

Charles Wesley expressed this doctrine so well in the familiar Christmas carol, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* —

Christ by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of a Virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity!
Made as man with men to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.

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Preaching "Another Jesus"

The Apostle Paul warns us against being taken in by the preaching of a "Jesus" who is anything less than fully God, and who is not revered as fully God. In Second Corinthians chapter eleven, beginning at verse three, he writes:

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted — you may well put up with it!

Dear friend, don't put up with the preaching of "another Jesus." If that's the kind of preaching you're getting in the church you're attending, I encourage you to find a church where the true Christ is faithfully preached.

The Impeccable Christ

Before we leave this verse in Colossians, I also want to relate it to another practical issue in the church today. And once again, it has to do with the diminished view of Christ that is preached and believed in many churches today.

According to reliable surveys, nearly half of professing Evangelical Christians today – 45% – do not believe that Jesus Christ was sinless. And behind this is a false teaching in the church today, the teaching that Jesus Christ, while He was on earth, was capable of committing sin. Let me explain to you that the Bible clearly says that

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this is not the case. Jesus Christ did not ever sin, and He was not capable of sin. If either had been true, He would not have been qualified to be our substitute as the perfect sacrifice for sins upon the cross. Three things in Scripture tell us this is so.

Christ's Divine Attributes Necessitate Impeccability

First of all, the *divine attributes* of Christ testify to the fact that He did not sin and could not sin. Hebrews 13:8 tells us that Jesus Christ is unchangeable and immutable and therefore He could not sin on earth, just as He did not sin in heaven. If Christ could have sinned while on earth, then He could sin now as He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Also, Matthew 28:18 tells us that Jesus Christ is omnipotent, all-powerful, and therefore He is not susceptible to sin. John 2:25 tells us that Jesus Christ is omniscient, all-knowing, and therefore He could not be deceived by sin. And deception, the Bible tells us, is one of the principal ways that sin comes about.

Also, sin is by nature an inward response to outward temptation. We read of that in James 1:14-15. But Jesus had no inward sinful nature that could respond to outward temptation. Also, Jesus possessed a singular will, and that will was to do the will of the Father. And in John 10:18 and other passages we see that while Jesus was on earth, the divine Son of God had complete authority over His humanity.

Scripture's Descriptions of Christ Declare His Impeccability

Secondly, *the Bible's descriptions* of Jesus Christ testify to the fact that He did not sin and could not sin. The angel Gabriel, in announcing the virgin birth to Mary in

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Luke chapter one, told her that the child born to her would be holy, and the Greek word means that he would be separate and apart from sin.

In Hebrews 7:26, Jesus is spoken of as "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." The writer of Hebrews piles one adjective upon another, and his point is not merely to emphasize the fact that Jesus did not sin, but the fact that He was not capable of sinning. He says that Jesus is holy, and the word means "unpolluted" by sin. He says that Jesus is harmless, and that word means that He is completely "empty of evil." He says that Jesus is undefiled, and that word means that He is absolutely "free from contamination." And, he says that Jesus is "separate from sinners," and the words literally mean that He is "completely divided asunder from those who miss the mark."

Christ's Temptations Prove His Impeccability

And finally, *the fact that Jesus resisted all temptations, and the fact that no one could prove any accusation of wrongdoing against Him*, these are the proofs of the fact that He did not and could not sin. He was, as Hebrews 4:15 tells us, "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." The word translated "tempted" denotes being tried and proven. The fact that He resisted temptation was the proof of who He was and is.

As God incarnate, Jesus Christ was not capable of sin, and the sinless perfection of His humanity was demonstrated by His perfect life. Only Jesus could live the perfect life we could not live, so that Jesus could die the death we deserved to die — a

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perfect death that propitiated the Father's wrath forever. Jesus is our perfect Redeemer in every sense of the word.

And that is why the writer to the Hebrews can say, in chapter two, verse eighteen, "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are being tempted." Christian, as you face temptations today, trust in the help of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who was tempted in every way that you are, and more – and yet He did not sin. He is your perfect Savior.

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