

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

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(Editors Note. As we are now in the 21st century, modern churches including Elim, other Pentecostals and charismatics make the Holy Spirit supreme along with the speaking in tongues. This is not Scriptural. The Holy Spirit draws men to Christ, glorifies the Lord Jesus and the Bible teaches the supremacy of Christ.)

In Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in Him. Colossians 2 9-10.

In all things Christ is to have the pre eminence. Colossians 1.18

These words are in the heart, and are the heart, of the Letter to the Colossians. Jewish Christians, imbued with heathen philosophy, were leading the converts in two directions, doctrinally and practically, theologically and ethically.

On the one hand, they were substituting inferior and created beings, angelic mediators, for the Divine Head Himself, and, on the other hand, they were insisting on the ritual, and ascetic observances as the foundation of their moral teaching. Intellectualism characterised the one error, and ritualism the other : mysticism on the one hand, and formalism on the other. These errors were known respectively as Gnosticism and Judaism, and their common source was the conception of matter as the origin and abode of evil.

Now the apostle Paul has but one answer for both of these errors, namely, that Christ is Supreme. He shows that wrong views as to the true nature of the Lord means wrong views about everything else throughout the universe, for Christ is the full and final revelation and manifestation of Deity. The apostle shows Him to be the Creator of all things (1.16), the Head of the Church (1.18) and the Fulness of God (1.19; 2.9). In our texts the whole ground is covered, for here it is an authoritative declaration concerning God, and Christ, and Man, with their relation and correspondence. In these few simple words is represented the sevenfold truth which is the foundation of Christianity.

1. The Godhead

The word occurs three times in the English version of the New Testament but it represents a different Greek word each time. In Acts 17. 29, it says, We ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold ; and the word there means that which is Divine. In Romans 1. 20 we read of His eternal power and Godhead and there it means Divinity, the property of God. But in our first text the word has its fullest significance, and means Deity. Here then, and throughout the Bible, the fundamental fact and truth is that there is one God. God was from the beginning because He was in the beginning and both natural and revealed religion assume this fact.

2. The Fulness of the Godhead.

This suggests an analysis of the previous idea. It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to think in the abstract of Deity. That vast thought must be broken up for our understanding, and made apprehendable. Bishop Lightfoot has explained this fulness as the totality of the Divine powers and attributes ; and Bishop Moule has spoken of it as the whole glorious total of what God is. The fulness of the Godhead is just all that God is. We can never comprehend the fulness though we may apprehend it, nor can we ever apprehend all that may be known of God as He is revealed to man in history and in Christ.

God is characterised by perfect purity, that is holiness ; by perfect knowledge, that is truth ; by perfect integrity, that is righteousness ; by perfect goodness, that is love ; and by perfect ability, that is power. These are but a few of God's attributes yet, how vast and profound is each of them! The fulness of Deity is something that utterly transcends the power of created intelligence to grasp, but we are not left to grapple with these abstract ideas, for our next text tells us :

3. The Fulness of the Godhead is in Christ.

In Him is made emphatic by its place in the sentence. In Christ is manifest what God is. He represents and is God so that what characterises God characterises Him. In Him therefore, is perfect purity, perfect knowledge, perfect integrity, perfect goodness, perfect ability and every other quality and attribute which is in God.

But the illuminated and inspired apostle does not leave it at that, although all that he has to say is there in essence. He elaborates the thought, and presents the fact that

4. The Fulness of the Godhead is in Christ bodily.

The word bodily occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, and, perhaps, is best translated bodily-wise that is with a bodily manifestation. This adds something of great importance to what has already been said. The fulness of the Godhead was always in Christ, for it pleased the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell (1.19) as we read, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. There never was a time when the Divine fulness was not in the Word; what is said here is that the fulness was incarnated in Him. This statement declares at once the fact, the need, and the intention of the Incarnation. God could only reveal Himself savingly to men through a Man, and so He added humanity to Deity in the person of Christ, and in this way expressed Himself in terms which we could understand.

The fulness of the Godhead is equally in the Holy Spirit, but it is not in Him bodily. Deity became incarnate only in the Son. The importance of the word bodily here may be judged by the fact that it anticipates to destroy two major heresies, the Docetic theory that Jesus had no human body and the Corinthian theory that the Man Jesus and the aeon Christ must be distinguished. These theories are exploded by this simple, profound declaration that in Christ is the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

It must be remembered that the Holy Spirit draws men to Christ and does not seek glory for himself but to glorify the Lord Jesus (John 16 13-14) in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily. In all things, note ALL things, Christ must be pre eminent.

But there is yet more to be said. Every word in this utterance adds something to the full truth ; and so we learn

5. The Fulness of the Godhead is ALL in Christ bodily.

It was being taught that Christ was only the highest of a number of aeons ; but Paul divinely illumined, declares that ALL of God's fulness is in Christ, and in none other. The truth as it is in Jesus is a much repeated phrase. and is supposed to be a Bible quotation ; for what Paul says in Ephesians is as truth is in Jesus which is a different idea. Truth as it is in Jesus leads itself to the idea that, with many others, He had a modicum of truth and that all scattered truths make one truth ; but what Paul is saying in Ephesians and in Colossians is that all truth is in Christ : that He is not a beam of light, but the Sun. Christ is the whole image of the invisible God. He is not only the chief manifestation of the Divine nature, but He exhausts the Godhead manifested. In Him resides the totality of Divine power and attributes. The apostle asserts and repeats the assertion that the pleroma abides absolutely wholly in Christ, the Word of God. The entire light is concentrated in

Him. With this, one might think that all has been said that can be said, but yet there is another word which enriches the revelation, namely, that

6 All the Fulness of the Godhead DWELLS in Christ bodily.

This disposes of the idea that Incarnation was a temporary manifestation of Deity just for the accomplishment of salvation, and the economy ended with the Ascension. What is declared is that Christ has become and remains the eternal manifestation of Deity; that in Him the Godhead has its fixed and permanent abode. The idea of dwelling and sojourning is deeply contrasted with Genesis 37. 1 where we read Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojourning and the Septuagint uses the word of out text for dwelt.

Christ is still the visible embodiment of the Godhead. Stephen saw Him at the right hand of God; and when angels declared that this same Jesus shall come in like manner as ye have seen Him go at the Ascension this is a profound mystery but a revealed fact. When Christ passed through the heavens and ascended up far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world but also in the world that is to come, He took with Him His humanity and is there the Archetype of glorified humanity.

What, then, this passage has taught us so far is that the fulness of Deity is in Christ; that it is in Him bodily; that it is all in Him; and that it dwells in Him. But of what practical value and interest is that revelation to you and to me? That inquiry is immediately answered in the words, And in Him ye are being fulfilled. In Christ, and in Him only, God is our fulness and our goal. He is not only the link between man and God, but is the sphere of the believer's life, and the supply of our every need. The destined end of man is to be partaker of the Divine nature, and to be humanly complete, and that end is realised in Christ. What is true in the love, and will, and act of God may become true in our individual experience by faith and obedience, and where there are these we are being fulfilled and made complete; our fulness comes from His fulness, so that, as there is no lack in Him there need be no want in us. In Christ, as a sphere of life we may realise our manhood and our womanhood becoming what in Christ we are. Here, the revelation and experience are being brought together; God and man are united in fulness with Christ, and the service of Christianity is gathered up in our sentence. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily and ye are complete in Him.

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