

Chapter 6

The Fullness of Christ in Fellowship

Key Scriptures:

- “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.” (Colossians 2:9–10)
- “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11–13)

The “fullness of Christ” is a beautiful phrase that Paul uses in a letter to the Ephesian church. He also wrote to the Colossians about being brought to fullness in Christ. What does Paul mean by the fullness of Christ, and how are we brought into it? It would take many books to fully describe our Savior’s richness, if it’s even possible. Words cannot describe the abundance of Christ, but this study points us in the right direction. We will also come to see the obstacles we have set up that keep us from the riches of God’s kingdom.

Though none of us will come to a pinnacle of perfection in this life, even so we are called to press forward to receive all Christ ministers to us. To push on doesn’t mean that we, by our own effort or in our own strength, work to reach some artificial measure of piety. Instead, we have a way opened to enter into the abundance of the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord Jesus opened the way, and today is the day to enter.¹ We look forward to eternal blessings, but we are called to enter by faith into this abundance now.

At the very moment when Jesus gave up His spirit as He hung on the cross, the veil that shrouded the Holy of Holies was torn open from top to bottom. Before this time only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year.² Now, in Christ, because the curtain was rent in two, we may enter into God’s holy presence. We surrender all of ourselves to Christ in this holy place, and Christ accomplishes His good work in yielded souls.

Let’s press on to learn the effects of this miraculous work Jesus accomplishes in our hearts and lives. The following is incomplete, but it’s like turning the key for your car—it’s a good place to start. We can learn more of what

1. Hebrews 3:15.

2. Hebrews 9:7.

He holds out to us in His nail-pierced hands.

In His fullness, we come to know more of the splendor and beauty of His name. We grow to function as parts of His body (the church). We live and walk by faith in the resurrection power of Christ. God’s saving grace is manifested to us. The Light of Life lights our pathway. As we press forward, we are given the key to knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Every day of our lives is a search to know wisdom and truth. Godly love is preeminent in our lives and saturates every action, word, and relationship. Christ, the Word, provides direction for our footsteps through the day and night. We come before God, in Christ, with great reverence and awe to bow in His presence and worship at His footstool.³ With humble hearts and contrite in spirit, we come into the Father’s favor.⁴ To realize the fullness of Christ, we receive the empowering work of the Spirit of Christ for the ministries of all spiritual gifts given to strengthen the church.

In the fullness of Christ, we are given generous hearts. God’s commands are written on our hearts. A willingness to sacrifice on behalf the kingdom of heaven inspires our deeds. True humility is the essence of the words we speak. With a penitent spirit, we come before the throne of grace. We consider others better than ourselves. Our hearts are ready to forgive those who offend or harm us. We live our lives in keeping with repentance. Every day our baptism is fulfilled in us—we have died to sin, and we are raised up in the power of the resurrected Christ. It is in Him that we are brought into peace with our heavenly Father.⁵

It would be natural to think, “this is impossible.” But in forgiveness and mercy, we press on toward the goal. Now we will learn about some of the obstacles that keep us from all that our Lord Jesus holds out to us.

One barrier that keeps us from the abundance of Christ is a pervasive individualistic sentiment in American culture. I’ve heard too many people say, “I love Jesus, I just can’t do the church thing.” But that’s like saying, “I enjoy a sip of cool water when I’m thirsty but don’t ever expect me to swallow it.” When we give up gathering together in Jesus’ name, we have created a recipe for serious spiritual dehydration.

The hitch is that we tend to see ourselves as mavericks, blazing our own trail. When westernized Christians read, “We have gained access by faith into this grace,”⁶ we have a mindset that interprets it as, “I have access.” While true, our individualism excludes us from one of the greatest blessings of God’s

3. Psalm 99:5.

4. Isaiah 66:2.

5. Romans 5:1–2.

6. Romans 5:2.

grace, and that is to be a functioning part in a fellowship of Christian faith. It's a good thing to pray in the solitude of our prayer closet, but the power of praying in agreement with a community of faith is awesome beyond comparison. We can worship the Lord with singing as we tend our tomato vines. This song of praise is like the flame of a single candle. But a time of singing in corporate worship is like the mighty blaze of many candles. The flame of one candle might be blown out, but together the candles will reignite each other.

How can a body function if there is only one part or one candle? Christians are not like single-celled amoebas. The path we're on isn't intended to be like, just me and my horse. Christ Jesus, the Head of the church, has made all of us together to be His body—the church. He does not want to accomplish His divine plan without followers serving as His hands and feet. Because of this, Jesus Christ has made His body, the church, with many working parts. And all these various parts work better together.

Paul refers to this community of faith in his epistle to the Colossians. He teaches that our leaders, elders, teachers, presbyters, pastors, and evangelists are a special gift. Their work is to serve, equip, train, build-up, and teach, so that the saints may become unified in faith, brought together as one body in Christ, made complete in the knowledge of God's Son, and grow in grace and knowledge. The fullness of Christ is best accomplished in a gathering of the body of Christ. Our teachers, elders and pastors, who are anointed to minister, help to serve this good purpose.

To fully function under the headship of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and do our part as the body of Christ, we are called to gather together in Jesus' name. We do not come into the fullness of Christ or the richness of the kingdom of heaven as self-sufficient individuals. As new creations in Christ, we are made part of a whole. Conforming to Christ in His body is the way into the fullness of Christ and the richness of the Gospel.

With boldness we enter into God's holy presence because we come before God in Christ, and in the fullness of Christ. We stand before the Father surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and a community of faith. We come before the Father with our sins forgiven, washed, and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. We stand before the Father washed in the waters of holy baptism. We enter into God's holy presence as we gather together at the Lord's Table. And all the goodness of God's kingdom is held out to us in our worship gatherings in Jesus' name. We are brought together in the ministries of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and together we come into the fullness of Christ.

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 3:14)

6. The Fullness of Christ in Fellowship

Q & A

1. What obstacles have kept you from knowing the fullness of Christ?

2. Why is gathering together an important part of entering into the richness of Christ?
