

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "All the Fullness of the Godhead in a Body" (Colossians 2:9)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/17/2011

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Three Imperatives Thus Far in Our Study

I want to call your attention once again to the important passage that is found in the book of Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four. If you are able to do so as you are listening, I trust that you will open your Bible and follow along with me as I read. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four. The Apostle Paul under divine inspiration writes these words:

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware 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. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Now in this series of messages, we have seen that the Apostle Paul is telling us about Satan's ever-present triple threat to the church, and how to deal with it. Satan always seeks to use three main things, in order to undermine the individual

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believer's spiritual life and testimony. Satan also uses those same three things as he seeks to undermine the testimony and the message of the church as a body.

Those three things, as we find them in Colossian chapter two, are worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines. We have seen that the Devil is always trying to infiltrate these three things into our lives and into our thinking, and into the message of the church. And he does it in many different ways, and often in very subtle ways. Many evils and errors fall under these three headings.

We have seen that in Colossians chapter two, the Apostle Paul is telling us how to deal with these threats. He does so by giving us a series of imperatives. We have already studied three of them, and I want to briefly remind you of them before we move on, because each imperative builds upon the ones that come before it.

First, in verse six, Paul tells us that we must walk an enlightened walk: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him."

Second, in verse seven, Paul tells us that we must grow upon a firm foundation: "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

Third, in verse eight, Paul tells us that we must beware of the enemy's forces and the enemy's tactics. "Beware," Paul says, "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."

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Imperatives Four and Five

And in his usual logical way, this brings the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to the point where he sets forth two final imperatives. Now these two things are not stated in the text using imperative verbs, but they are stated in the form of the strongest possible declarations. And so from those declarations we can draw these two final imperatives. And once again, as in the other imperatives, the focus is upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Look, once again, at verses nine and ten:

“For in Him [in Jesus Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

Here, then are the two final imperatives, two further things that we must do, in order to put up and keep up a solid battle front against Satan’s triple threat to the Christian and the church. Number four, we must trust in a complete Savior – the One in whom “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” the One who “is the head of all principality and power.” Number five, we must rest in a complete salvation, because we as believers are complete in Christ.

The Fullness of God in a Body: Key Questions

Today I want to focus our attention on the fourth imperative: We must trust in a complete Savior. Jesus Christ is the complete Savior. There is nothing lacking in Him – nothing lacking in who He is, and nothing lacking in what He has done, is

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doing, and will do for those who call upon His name to be saved. Jesus Christ Himself is the One in Whom we stand against Satan's triple threat to the church. He is the only One in whom we can take such a stand.

Now, this leads us to a set of critical questions. This is something, by the way, that you should always be doing as you read the Bible. Ask questions of the text, and seek the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind and illuminate the text for you. Now in this particular verse, we need to ask at least three questions.

The first is this: What does the Bible mean when it says that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ? How is this possible? How, specifically, did it come about?

Secondly: What does the Bible mean when it says that Jesus Christ is "the head of all principality and power"?

The third question we need to ask is this: Why are these facts about Jesus Christ so vitally important, especially as we consider this matter of standing firm against Satan's triple threat to the church?

The Godhead in a Body: A Doctrine We Must Believe

We are, of course, speaking here first of all, of the doctrine of the incarnation. Now, this is a very big subject. And some people want to make it an impossible subject. They want to put the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the realm of the

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mystical, the realm of the nebulous, the realm of something that cannot be understood at all.

And of course we realize that we cannot understand everything about the incarnation of Jesus Christ. To begin with, we cannot fully comprehend the love that would motivate the Holy God of the Universe to come and live among His sinful creatures, in a body like theirs, for the express purpose of dying to atone for their sins and thus propitiate His own wrath against sinners. But the Bible tells us that He has done exactly that.

That we do understand, and so much more. God has given us these things to be understood in such a way that we can be saved from our sins, and live a life that is pleasing to Him, and be prepared for the life to come.

But there were people in Paul's day, in the time of the Colossian church, people who wanted to put Jesus Christ entirely into a mystical realm. The mystery religions of that day wanted to deny that it was even possible that God would come and dwell in one body. So many of these mystery religions had a doctrine of what amounted to a "distributed God". This was the false teaching that said that there were many forms of God in the world, and that Jesus Christ was only one of them, and that these various forms collectively made up God.

Paul here in Colossians chapter two verse nine is expressly calling that kind of teaching, and all the other kinds of mystical teachings about Jesus that deny the Biblical doctrine of the incarnation – Paul is calling all of these things a lie. "In

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Him" – in Jesus Christ alone, Paul declares, "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body." That is a concise statement of the doctrine of the incarnation.

You see, dear friends, God the Father sent God the Son into the world so that He Himself, God the Father, might be known and understood by man. John chapter one, verse eighteen tells us that Jesus came into the world to declare – literally, to exegete or exposit or explain – God the Father to us.

And likewise, God the Father and God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit into the world so that God's written Word might be known and understood by man. And, it is God's Word that gives us these great doctrines upon which our Christian faith rests – the doctrine of the full deity of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the full humanity of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The essence of all of these is Paul's statement here in Colossians chapter two verse nine, that "in [Jesus] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body."

Dear friends, you cannot deny this doctrine and be a Christian. The church cannot deny this doctrine, or gloss over this doctrine in its message, and be a Christian church. Satan wants us to do those things. In so many ways, Satan wants us to mingle the genuine doctrine of the authentic Christ with worldly philosophy, and legalism, and man-made doctrines.

Satan will try to get Christians and the church to mysticize Jesus Christ. Satan will try to get you to redefine Jesus in your thinking so that He is just another man – perhaps a better man than any of us, but nevertheless just a man. There is a

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tendency in much of today's Evangelical preaching to over-emphasize Jesus' humanity to the point of dangerously diminishing or even denying His deity. Satan will also try to get the church to teach that Jesus somehow became the Son of God, that He is not the eternal Son of God. In other words, Satan wants us to embrace "another Jesus" – just as Paul warned the Corinthian church.

That is what Satan wants. But God wants you to come to grips with the true doctrine of Christ. Every human being must, sooner or later, come to grips with that critical question that Jesus put before His disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" And there is only one correct answer, there is only one saving answer, and it is the great declaration that Peter gave in response to Jesus' question. He said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Lord Jesus, You are God in a body.

The Godhead in a Body: How?

So let us now take up the first question I stated a few moments ago. What does the Bible mean when it says that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ? How is this possible? How, specifically, did it come about? Let me call your attention to some of the key passages in the Word of God that help us understand this.

We find the doctrine "Christ, the Son of the living God" – the doctrine of the incarnation – also stated for us all the way back in the prophecy of Isaiah, in chapter seven, verse fourteen: "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name

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Immanuel.” In his account of the birth of Christ, Matthew reminds us of this prophecy – Mathew chapter one, beginning at verse twenty-two: “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel’, which is translated, ‘God with us’.” “God with us.”

Dear friend, this is why the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is so vital. Anyone who denies the virgin birth of Jesus Christ denies that He is God. The coming of “God with us” – the incarnation, the coming of God into this world in the body of a man – involved supernatural conception. If Jesus Christ had had a human father as we do, he would have inherited Adam’s sin nature as we do. He would have inherited the guilt of Adam’s sin, as we do. But Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. He had no earthly father.

And thus, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, Hebrews chapter seven, verse twenty six, Jesus came into this world as a high priest who was and remained “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” The writer piles one adjective upon another to make his point.

Jesus was and is “holy” – completely free of anything having to do with sin. Jesus was and is, as our English Bibles have it, “harmless” – the word actually means “completely innocent of any wrongdoing”. Jesus was and is “undefiled” – the word means that He is completely free of a sin nature, that such a thing is foreign to His nature. Jesus was and is “separate from sinners” – the word separate

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is a strong one, and it means that there is an un-crossable divide, an un-bridgeable difference of nature, between the perfect Lord Jesus Christ and the sinners He lived among and came to save. Completely holy. Completely innocent. Completely undefiled. Completely separate, by nature, from sinners.

And thus, Paul tells us in Second Corinthians chapter five, verse twenty-one, that Jesus, who knew no sin, was made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. In the original language this is a very significant verse. When Paul says that Jesus "knew no sin" he is using a negative word in a unique way in the Greek. Paul is saying that Jesus Christ had no personal relationship with sin. He is saying that Jesus had no sin nature as we have. He is saying that Jesus had not sinned in Adam, as we all have. He is saying that Jesus had no sin for which He Himself was personally responsible. But this One who knew no sin, took our sins upon Himself, paid the penalty for them with His own blood, and appeased the wrath of God the Father.

Much More to Say

Dear friends, there is a great deal more that I need to say about this great fact, that in Jesus Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body. In our next message, the Lord willing we are going to look at two more passages that are critical to our understanding of how it is possible for God and man to be joined in one body, in the person of Jesus Christ.

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The first of those passages is found in Philippians chapter two, verses five through eleven. I just want to read them for you today. The Apostle Paul says this:

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.

The second passage we are going to focus on in our next message helps to explain important details of the one that I have just read. That second passage is found in Matthew chapter sixteen, beginning at verse twenty-eight, and it extends into the beginning of the next chapter. Jesus said this to His disciples:

Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

And then in the very next verse, at the beginning of Matthew chapter seventeen, we read this:

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Now after six days [six days after He made that statement] Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He [Jesus] was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!' And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.' When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.' " (Matthew 16:28-17:9)

Dear friend, you need to put up and keep up a solid battle front against Satan's triple threats to the church, because those threats almost always involve some denial or diminishment of the great doctrine of who the Lord Jesus Christ actually is – all the fullness of the Godhead in a body. And it is because He is who the

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Bible says He is, that you can defeat Satan when he comes against you or against your church. In our next message, the Lord willing, we shall see with ever-growing assurance why these things are true.

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