

Ephesians 1: 23; “The Fullness of Him”, Message # 10 in a series entitled – “The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, a Bible Study prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 12th, 2019, for those gathered at his home.

We read here that the church is Christ’s body. And, when he says this, the apostle Paul is speaking of Christ’s mystical spiritual body which is composed of all the saints in all generations of time from the beginning of the world until the end of the world; the total number of God’s elect, which the Father gave to the Son; to love and to redeem them; to die and pay the ransom price for their salvation, and then to betroth them to Himself forever. How good it is to think about Christ as the Person who brings us to God, and the Person who Himself is God the Son. Christ is Head over all things to His Church, and He was not simply given by the Father to be Head over her to rule her, but He was also given, to cause her to know and to experience the demonstration of His fullness, so that we His Church would be the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

So we must ask – What does it mean for the Church to be the fullness of Christ who fills all in all? Well, 1st of all – It means that Christ has a spiritual fullness in Him of which we have all received. And 2nd – It means that every aspect of His grace and truth are to be seen in His body the Church. Let us now think together about the great purposes of God in having the Church be the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

1st of all – Christ has a spiritual fullness in Him of which we as believers have all received.

Turn with me over to John chapter 1 and verses 14-17. It says here – “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” “John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” And then the apostle John adds – “ And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” We see here that the eternal Logos, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among men, specifically with the apostles, the 12 that He called, and with John the Baptist also, because he is specifically mentioned in this context as bearing witness to Christ. They all beheld something in our Lord Jesus, something which they did not have by nature in themselves in the same sense. They beheld the glory of God in Christ.

There was a fullness of glory which they beheld in Him. The word “fullness” in the Greek here is πληρωματος (the root word is Pleroma). Now, in God His glorious attributes are all infinitely full of glory in His Being. He is incomprehensible in terms of our being able to take in how glorious He really is. He is absolutely perfect beyond our wildest conception. And the Lord Jesus is described in the 1st chapter of the book of Hebrews as the radiance, the brightest aspect possible of His Father’s glory. The glory of the Son which was beheld by these men who were close to Jesus was essentially, the excellency and perfection of the Divine Nature in Christ, and His excellency and perfection in His human nature as well. In His Godhead as the Son, He is infinite and eternal; He is infinitely wise and holy, and He is immense; that is, He fills all things. But this glorious attribute is incommunicable to us who are created beings. We are human and not Divine, and to compound the matter, we are needy sinners as well.

But God so loved the world of fallen mankind sinners that He gave His only begotten Son to be Head over all things to the Church. He gave Him to us so that He would be able to give to us, of His fullness. Because there is this fullness in Jesus Christ, He communicates to every believer out of that fullness, grace upon grace. How then, can we be comforted and know that our sins are forgiven? How can we be encouraged and be enabled to do what God commands when we are fallen creatures by nature? We find all of this by faith in Jesus. By faith we draw upon the perfect merits of our Savior. By faith we receive of His fullness, the grace to spiritually live and to be sustained in that true spiritual life, day by day until we reach our eternal home. We not only have

received saving knowledge through the word of God, and God opening our eyes to the truth of it, but we also, by faith, receive of His fullness to do what is right in all the various situations of our life as we determine to do His will. As it says in verse 12 of chapter 1 of John here, when we receive Christ by faith, we receive the power to become the child of God. We receive also the power to do what is right, out of Christ's fullness.

For it says here, in verse 17, that the law came through Moses. And we know that the law most certainly tells us what God's righteous will is for our lives. It is to keep His commandments. And yet ultimately the law will only fill us with fear because we know that we fall so far short of doing what God commands, in a perfect sense. The law cannot give us any power to do what it commands. However, because the believer draws upon the perfect faithfulness of Christ, His having fulfilled the law on our behalf, there is a fullness of grace which we will find over and over again coming to us in our experience, according to the word of God, and in relation to our not receiving this grace in vain, but improving upon all that we are given. Romans 5: 20 – "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound." "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life." You see that Christ's fullness will help us in every way to do what is right. Grace is greater than all our sin.

Getting back to John chapter 1, verse 15, John the Baptist said of Christ that He "came after him, and yet He was preferred before him because He was before him. This statement reveals to us the fact that John the Baptist was declaring Christ's eternity, and thus His Deity. And he was also confessing His need of grace from Christ. But what this passage is teaching us, is that there was a most definite reason for the Incarnation; the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. It was so that Christ would live a perfect human life and die a sacrificial death on the cross, and thus He would purchase the grace that we would need to receive, in order to be saved; grace that we would need to have in all of its fullness so that we might be transformed to be like Christ, and thus glorify God in the way that we live our lives. Jesus lived in a perfect way and He died in substitutionary way so that by faith in Him we might come to glorify God in the way that live our lives. It is out of Christ's fullness of grace and truth that He communicates to us what we need, so that we might know God, and be pleasing to Him, by receiving Christ and receiving of His fullness. "Of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace, or grace upon grace it is translated in the New American Standard and the ESV translations.

I take this phrase "grace for grace" to mean that a needy sinner needs initial grace; the favor being shown them mercifully by God so that their eyes will be opened to the truth of the gospel, and to have Holy Spirit work in them in a saving way, by working in their heart, opening the eyes of their heart, and causing them to be born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. You receive of Christ's fullness at your conversion, when you first believe in the gospel; that Christ fulfilled all righteousness, and the Father then imputes to you that perfect righteousness which covers you as robe which you spiritually wear. When you believe in Christ you are sealed with the Holy Spirit and Christ then dwells in your heart by faith and you begin to receive of His fullness of imparted grace each and every day. Imputed righteousness covers you dear believer, and imparted grace begins and continues the process of your sanctification and transformation, day by day, and you receive of the fullness of Christ to see the truth and to do His will.

2nd – The Fullness of Him who fills all in all means that every aspect of His grace and truth are to be seen in His body the Church.

The Church is Christ's body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. We are talking about gifts and graces here, which Christ fills His Church with. Spiritual gifts come from Christ and spiritual grace in all of its aspects is displayed in and through the Church, to the glory of God. Both come from His giving to her of His fullness so that she, the Church, may faithfully fulfill her duties to Him and show forth her love to Him in keeping His word. Through this means every member of

Christ's Church is built up in their most holy faith, both in the local church of which a believer is a part, and also the wider visible Universal Church here, that we come into contact with outside of our own church. Christ's purpose in His doing this, in He is giving her of His fullness so that He will be completed by her, and that His cause and Kingdom might be furthered by her. He is the Head and she is the mystical spiritual body composed of real members with real needs both to receive and to give, contribute, and serve Him in living their life to Him. John Calvin says – "This is the highest honor of the Church, that, until He is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect." "What consolation is it for us to learn, that, not until we are along with him, does he possess all his parts, or wish to be regarded as complete!" (that is, "along with Him in the fulfilling of all of God's decrees concerning the purpose of His having a Church to bring glory to God with) "His wish to be filled, and, in some respects, made perfect in us, arises from no want or necessity (that is in Him); for all that is good in ourselves, or in any of the creatures, is the gift of His hand; and His goodness appears the more remarkably in raising us out of nothing, that He, in like manner, may dwell and live in us."

Well, turn with me over to Ephesians 4, verses 7-16 – "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, AND GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." "(Now this, "HE ASCENDED", what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?" "He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)" "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

Now, I will deal with this passage more in depth when we come to it in our studies later on. But what I want you to see from it at this time, that it is out of Christ's fullness that grace is given to each and every believer, and it is given according to the measure of Christ's gift. The saints do not individually have all gifts and all grace, but they each have a particular gift or gifts. And each has a measure of grace imparted to them, to accomplish all that Christ would have them to do for Him in relation to the other members of the body of Christ. His ascending on high meant that when He ascended, He would send the Holy Spirit to His Church to convey these ministry gifts to each believer individually. Christ who descended to this earth to fulfill His ministry, to fulfill all righteousness and to suffer, bleed, and die on the cross for all of His people, successfully accomplished His mission, and so, having accomplished redemption, He now began to apply the benefits of what He had purchased, to His people, from His exalted position at the right hand of the Father, that He might fill all things, Paul says here. All things are all His people being filled with His fulness of grace and truth communicated to them, to accomplish His purposes in relation to the growth and spread of His kingdom and the building up of His Church.

So, He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry. He did this so that the body, His Church, would be edified; that it might be built up. And He has been doing this all through the many generations of the Church, filling them out of His fullness with the truth of His word, through His servants the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastor-teachers, so that the whole Church might come to the unity of the faith, and a fuller knowledge of the Son of God; that she might as the Church age progresses, come more and more to the stature of the fullness of Christ; might represent Him in a better and better way as she grows in the knowledge of the truth and in

grace. And that a greater practical unity coming to exist between believers based upon truth, as time goes by. As the generations go by, the Church ought to be able, all together, to better represent Christ to the watching, unbelieving world. The Church all over the world ought to be able to serve Christ and work for Christ and witness to the word of His grace, so that His kingdom might truly advance and the gospel conquer among the nations. This is what it means to grow up to be a perfect man. It means for each individual believer to grow up into the fullness of Christ, and the Church Universal upon the earth to grow up as well; both levels growing up into the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This is where prayer and the graces of the Spirit really come into play. Turn over to Ephesians 3: 8-21. “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” “Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.” “Amen.

Again, I will not teach on this passage in depth. But, I want to show you that Paul tells the believers here in Ephesus that he was given grace out of Christ’s fullness to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages had been hidden in God; that is, that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to all the angelic beings; how it is that Christ give out of His fullness to all of his people to show forth to others, men and angels alike how they glorify Him by drawing upon the fullness that they find in Him. It is not all about you, dear Christian. It is all about the fullness that is in Christ and that you drink from it and draw strength from it daily in order to be saved and in order to glorify God through walking with Him in faith, in holiness, in righteousness, and in truth. And so what does Paul pray for, in regard to all who he is writing to?

He prays that the Father would grant to you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. Why? In order that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. So, you see here, that being filled to all the fullness of God is to come to a better experiential knowledge of the love of Christ, how very great it is! It passes knowledge, but nonetheless, it is the most heartwarming and motivating factor in living your life to God’s glory. You remember the perfection of Christ’s love to you the sinner, and you then see that this is enough for you; that is, that He will satisfy your soul at all times, so that you can commit yourself and all your personal concerns to Him. But even more, that you can commit the concerns that you have for the furtherance of His kingdom in the hearts of people around you, to Him as well, and know that He shall be enough for both you and them. And when you pray, remember that He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that you ask or think, according to the power that works in you, and you will want all the glory to go to Him.

