

Complete in Him Who Is the Head

by H.J. Vine

The sermon highlights the all-sufficiency of Christ and the necessity for believers to remain steadfast in their faith and unity as members of His body.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:21, Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 1:18, Colossians 2:8, Jude 1:3

Topics: "Christ Sufficiency", "Spiritual Deception"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the ceaseless influences that try to divert believers from Christ, warning against philosophy, carnal practices, and asceticism. He emphasizes the sufficiency of Christ, urging believers to increase in knowledge of Him to resist distracting influences. The sermon highlights the danger of being led astray from the true portion in Christ by worldly systems and the importance of abiding in Him to experience fullness and protection from deception.

Transcript

With strong and subtle energy various influences were ceaselessly at work to side-track the brethren in Christ at Colosse. Paul was aware of this, and though he had never seen them, he was guided by the Spirit to write showing them the all-sufficiency of Christ Jesus, warning them not to be diverted from Him in the slightest degree, and encouraging them to continue in Christ Jesus the Lord even as they had received Him when they first believed the Gospel of their salvation.

He sought to instruct them more fully as to the grace and glory of their Saviour, but he desired they should increase in the excellent knowledge of Him--the same One they had trusted at the start; and thus they would be preserved from the distracting and deadening influences which were attacking them so forcefully. There were philosophy, carnal religion, psychic practices and asceticism; and the apostle shows in chapter 2:8-23 that these things are the elements of the world and not according to Christ whom the world had rejected--that they are after the teachings and injunctions of men and not after Christ, who has died to the world which refused Him, and is now exalted as Head at God's right hand. In Him they had trusted. In Him they were to abide. He is enough.

Similar, and perhaps even more deceptive, influences are succeeding today in depriving many of the proper enjoyment of the true portion of the assembly which is rightly theirs in Christ Jesus--seducing them from "holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, ministered to and united together by the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God" (2:19). All that is necessary for the assembly, which is Christ's body, is in Him; but the constant energizing of Satan in that vast and varied system named "the mystery of

iniquity" is designed in one way or another to get the brethren away from this glorious truth. Just as on the other hand the present mighty working of God is to bring us to realize that all fullness, resides in Christ according to the truth of the other "great mystery . . . Christ and the assembly." Paul tells the Corinthians that he had espoused them to Christ, but he feared "lest by any means, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craft," so their thoughts should be corrupted from "SIMPLICITY AS TO CHRIST" (2 Cor. 11:3, N.Tr.).

Often we find Jehovah reminding His people, Israel, of the sad fact that all their trouble sprang from their turning away from Him. "Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel, says the Lord" (Jer. 3:20), He was their ALL, but they sought solace elsewhere. "They have forsaken Me the Fountain of living waters," He said. It was so with God's people of old, and John had to record later on of the assembly at Ephesus--where Paul laboured so long and so faithfully--"Thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4).

With wholesome zeal the apostle writes, "Beware!"--Yes, for it is easier to behold the danger of others than to be awake to our own--"BEWARE!!" therefore he says, "lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Col. 2:8). And then, as if he were anxious that we should not dwell unduly on the evil, he at once points us to the Divine Source of all good--to the infinite plenitude which resides in the One who is the Head of the assembly, as well as the Head of all authority, and in one magnificent Spirit-given statement of fact, which might well bow our hearts in adoration and worship--he sweeps aside all rivals, and places us in the presence of Christ, the all-sufficient One, as he says--"IN HIM DWELLS ALL THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY. AND YE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM WHO IS THE HEAD OF ALL PRINCIPALITY AND POWER" (Col. 2:9-10). Here then is the grand antidote! The fullness of the Infinite One dwells in Him in whom we are complete--in Him who came down beneath all for our salvation, who is now above all in exaltation--in the glorified Man who glorified God on earth, who is now crowned on high: in Him the Godhead fullness dwells bodily, and we, too, are filled full in Him. The **Plērōma** (fullness) of the Godhead is there, and we too are **Plēroē** (filled full) there also.

How gloriously simple this is, and yet how Divinely profound. It more than meets the creatures deepest need, and yet brings highest glory to the Creator. In it we behold the marvellous combinations of wisdom and majesty, grace and glory, love and power, along with the splendid distinctions of redemption and reconciliation, for it is in the One in whom we are blessed all the fullness resides; and as chapter 1:22 shows, it is in His body, through His death, we are now already reconciled to the fullness which is in Him. ALL is there! Our ALL is there! May we with this be satisfied!

"All fullness resides in Christ Jesus our Head,

And riches in glory beyond every need."

We do well to ponder the unfolding of this precious truth--to dwell upon it in the presence of God--to allow the wealth of it to sink down as heavenly moisture into our grateful hearts; and thus we shall be preserved not only from the dread effects of the workings of error, but be kept in the proper enjoyment of that which rightly is ours through Divine grace in Christ Jesus, the Head of the assembly. If Jehovah was the Fountain of living waters for Israel, now, in our glorious Saviour, the exalted Man, we are reconciled to the rich plenitude which is in Him, through His death, which put away all that was offensive to God.

The best illustrations can but partially aid us in our understanding of this great truth. Look yonder at that wonderful structure among the lofty hills which tower above it on every side! It is a reservoir. So carefully has it been designed, and so ably has it been formed, that it is capable of containing the liquid treasures of

those mighty mountains. Their brooks, streams and rushing rivulets pour their abundance lavishly into it. Far down in the distance there are cities, and townships, and villages, and farmsteads, and other homes. These, by a fine system of supply are immediately connected with the reservoir--the most excellent in the world! The mass of those who benefit have never seen it, and wiseacres are soon trading on their ignorance. They propose with their divining rods to locate independent springs for them, or to connect their homes with some waters which are in sight. Even if they are not the best, a system of filters will purify them they are told, and so on. Surely, it were simpler, easier, and far better to abide in relation to the fullness in the reservoir! Truly, but some restless beings welcome unnecessary difficulties, even though they lead to disaster. All are not satisfied to remain in "SIMPLICITY AS TO CHRIST,"--to abide in the faith once delivered to the saints. They prefer their own springs, or to walk by sight rather than by faith.

The apostle indicates this in chapter 1, after he has shown that we are reconciled to the fullness in Christ, as he says, "To present you holy and unblameable and irreproachable before it, if indeed ye abide in the faith founded and firm" (22-23, N.Tr.). Mark, he does not here say "abide in faith," or "in believing." Profession is in view, and we are told that some who profess "the faith" will turn from it. We are preserved as we abide in the faith. Grave dangers result from well-meaning men seeking by expediency to help the members of Christ's body by setting up independent supplies instead of seeking to recover the faith and affection of the members to the Head of the assembly. Schools, parties, sects, conferences, etc., are set going with the best of motives, but only in the long run to divert from the truth of Christ and the assembly practically, and from the resources of our Head on high. Even in regard to service, missions, councils, funds, secretaries, treasurers with offices and headquarters at some centre on earth are often established, thus frequently diverting the servants of the Lord from exercising faith in regard to the One who is above, and in getting direct guidance and support from Him. Is the exalted Head and Lord not sufficient for the saint and the servant too?

Is it honouring to Him when one says, "I am employed by the Society for--, and our headquarters are in London?" or "I am sent out by the G-- Mission?" or "I belong to the A-- Party and only go where I am sent or invited?" or "I am an ordained E-- minister, etc.?" Are such expressions consistent with the fact that each servant is directly responsible to his own Master? or with the indisputable fact that the gifts are given to men by the ascended Head of the assembly in view of the benefit of all the members of His body (Eph. 4:8-12)? Again, is it consistent with the truth of the all-sufficiency of Christ for the well-being of the assembly to arrange special conferences or gatherings which necessarily exclude many of the members of His body? Granting that the best motives govern the promoters--Is it following righteousness--consistency with the truth of Christ and the assembly--to convene semi-worldly meetings--classy meetings or conferences for a certain sort of believers--which ignore that which is of an assembly character? Is this abiding in the faith? We do not here refer to the individual work of a servant of the Lord. Human arrangements to meet present exigencies are often most sincere, but often most disastrous in the long run. The fullness of the Head abides, and a return to that is what faithful men should seek to promote among those who are members of His body.

It is for the faith which was delivered to the saints at the beginning we are to contend together, to be in the full benefit of--not to contend against opponents--but "FOR the faith . . . once delivered" (Jude 3). The inspired writings are able to fully furnish us, we are told (3 Tim. 3:17). This is important to recognize when so much is proposed, and so many claims made on our time, our service and our energies, for we can prayerfully enquire,--"Is this or that of the faith once delivered?"--"Is there Scripture for what is suggested? Many, who condemn traditional practices in others, give way themselves to expediency without Scriptural

warrant.

With a sense of glad relief and holy elevation of thought, we can turn again to the Holy Spirit's teaching, which abides as true today as when it was first made known in all its Divine beauty. In Christ "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are filled full in Him who is the Head of all principality and power," and we may surely be encouraged in "holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, ministered to and united together by the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God." Truly, as we said in regard to our illustration, it is "simpler, easier and far better to abide in relation to the fullness" than to be diverted by the man with the divining rod and his independent suggestions. Who or what can improve on that which has been Divinely established by God Himself for our faith to rejoice in?

How completely and perfectly He has set us up in relation to Christ Jesus our Lord, giving us to have our full repletion with and in Him. As regards the flesh we are (1) cut off in the circumcision of Christ, (2) buried with Him in baptism, (3) raised with Him through faith of the operation of God in raising Him from among the dead, (4) quickened together with Him, (5) having died with Christ from the elements of the world, we are now risen with Him, (6) our life is hid with Him in God, (7) when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory (Col. 2:11-3:4). Outside of Him therefore the assembly has no need to go, and does not the ministry of the Spirit by John constantly exhort us to abide in Him that our joy may be full. Yea, and in Ephesians 4, after the gifts given by the exalted Head have been spoken of, the members of the body are encouraged in this positive attitude--to "grow up to Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (v. 16).

"Then Lord remove whate'er divides

Our longing souls from Thee;

'Tis meet that where the Head resides,

The members' hearts should be."

The heavenly supplies would be so precious to us then, we should be preserved on the one hand from the loose and independent spirit which jauntily says, "I am not of the body" (1 Cor. 12:15)! And, on the other, from the legal and harsh spirit which peremptorily ejaculates, "I have no need of you" (v. 21)! "Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary" (v. 22). And the absurdity of independent meetings, setting aside effectually the truth of Christ's Headship of the "one body" on earth, would be turned from instinctively as a practical denial of that which we prove experimentally to be so blessedly true.

Purposefulness on our side is greatly needed! Let us not be side-tracked, beloved brethren! Let the normal truth--the truth which is the true portion of all the saints--be held fast by us! Let us overcome! God grant that we ourselves may not be overcome! Let the positive good, so freely given, be definitely before us!

"Its rich and unexhausted store,

And all its joys is ours."

OURS? Yes! Ours in Christ Jesus, in whom the fullness of the Godhead resides! We are complete in Him! Ah, but WHO IS HE?--Did we lovingly grow up in the excellent knowledge of Himself, we should shun as unworthy of Him much that is carelessly allowed. He, blessed be His Holy Name, is the Son of the Father's love, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the First in dignity of all Creation, for He created all the positions of dignity in the heavens and on the earth--the thrones, the lordships, the principalities, and the authorities. By Him and for Him were they all created. And He is before all, and all subsist together by Him. Moreover, He is the One who made peace by His precious blood and the Fullness was pleased to dwell in Him in view of reconciling all to itself by Him eventually; but in Him we are already reconciled to the Fullness, as we have seen. And He it is who is the Head of the body, the assembly. He is the Beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead. This is the One in whom we are filled full. How great, how gracious, how glorious is the assembly's Head!

Our glad hearts may well add their "AMENS," and their "HALLELUJAHS," to what the Spirit says concerning Him as the Head of the body, the assembly--the Beginning in resurrection--"that in all things He might have THE PRE-EMINENCE" (Col. 1:18).

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