

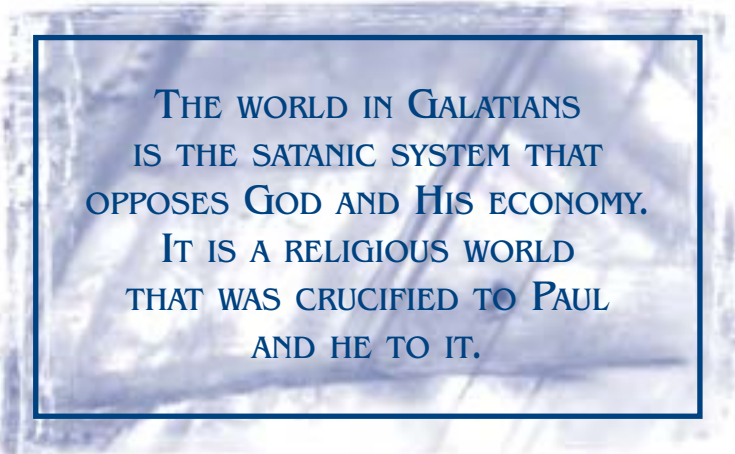
The Heart of the Divine Revelation

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians form a cluster of books in the New Testament, and any reader of the New Testament cannot help but be impressed by the profound utterances in these books. Although they are brief, their content is unfathomable and inexhaustible. Nevertheless, it is possible to read these books without discerning their central message. This may be likened to a visit to a national treasury. One may have a great sense of awe of the many artifacts of great value, but he may nevertheless leave without understanding the meaning of the whole. In any complex work there are basic points and crucial points. It is the latter, not the former, that allow us to understand the work's purpose, and if we identify the crucial point in each of these four books, we will obtain a clear understanding of what is at the heart of the divine revelation. At a certain point in the discourse of each book, the apostle Paul utters something that expresses its crucial point. In Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians, these points occur toward the end, and in Ephesians it occurs in the middle. Each crucial point is a key to knowing the subject, background, content, and central thought of the whole book. When we identify the crucial point in each book, we will understand the reason that these books are grouped together in the New Testament in the sequence in which they are found. As a result, the central vision in these books will become clear, and we will realize that the four books constitute the heart of the divine revelation of the New Testament. These four crucial points include the new creation in Galatians, being filled unto all the fullness of God in Ephesians, doing all things in Christ in Philippians, and Christ being all and in all in Colossians.

A New Creation

The term *new creation* refers to the sonship of the believers

(4:5), who are the sons of God into whom God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son (v. 6). In Galatians 6:15 Paul says, "Neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation is what matters." At the end of this Epistle, he contrasts both keeping the ordinances of the law and not keeping them with God's new creation. The new creation, rather than keeping the law or not keeping the law, is what matters.



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Paul wrote Galatians because the believers in Christ were deviating from Christ and turning back to the law. He exhorts them in 5:1 to "not be entangled with a yoke of slavery again," referring to the law (4:21), and he warns them in 5:2, saying, "If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." Subsequently, he declares

that those who seek to be justified by the law have been brought to nought, are separated from Christ, and have fallen from grace (v. 4). For Paul, the law has no place now that Christ has come (3:25; 4:30), and he associates religion, including misguided efforts to keep the law, with the present evil age from which he was rescued by the death of Christ (1:4). The present evil age for Paul was not an age full of sin and idolatry but an age full of religion generally and the Jewish religion specifically. This is confirmed in 6:13-15 with Paul's association of circumcision with the world that has been crucified to him. The Jewish religion was part of the evil age because it kept people from participating in the grace of the gospel by distracting them to the law. The world in Galatians is the satanic system that opposes God and His economy. It is a religious world that was crucified to Paul and he to it.

Whereas circumcision is a ritual ordinance of the law in the old creation, the new creation is God's masterpiece of life with the divine nature (3:26). The law and its ordinances are unable to give life (v. 21); they are impotent to

energize us to live a life that can be justified by God (2:16). Instead, the law was given to God's chosen people, who were living in the fallen humanity of Adam, in order to preserve and guard them until the coming of Christ with His redemption (3:23-24). When Christ comes to us through faith, He is revealed in us in order to enliven us and make us a new creation (1:16). Moreover, He lives in us to supply us with the riches of His life so that we may live as the new creation.

When Paul speaks of the new creation, he contrasts it with the ordinance of circumcision, even though he earlier contrasted the law with faith (3:23-26). Paul's change in emphasis is related to the fact that his focus is on the issue of faith, which is the new creation, the organic union of God and redeemed humanity, not on the principle of faith. In 2:16 Paul says, "We also have believed into Christ Jesus that we might be justified." The word *into* indicates that our believing brings us into union with Christ, a union of life, whereby we and Christ are organically one. In verse 20 Paul speaks further of this union, saying, "It is Christ who lives in me." When we believe in Christ, His crucifixion is applied to us, and He enters into us to be one with us. Therefore, we should no longer live, but Christ should live in us. After Paul speaks of no longer living, he seemingly contradicts himself, saying, "the life which *I now live* in the flesh I live in faith" (v. 20, emphasis added). There is no contradiction, however, because Paul is speaking of no longer living in the old creation, while at the same time living in the new creation. Paul was living in an organic union with Christ through faith. Christ was living in Paul and supplying him with all the riches of His divine life. Paul's living was Christ's living in him. Paul was no longer living in the old creation in Adam, but instead, he was living in an organic union with Christ. Faith brought Paul into an organic union with Christ, and this made him a new creation.

After mentioning the new creation, the apostle speaks of those who "walk by this rule" (6:16) which is to walk by the rule of the new creation. To walk by the new creation is to walk by the Spirit, to live by the Spirit, and to sow unto the Spirit (5:16, 25; 6:8).

The keeping of the law and the practicing of circumcision are a sowing unto the flesh; they do not change the old creation. But sowing unto the Spirit makes us a new creation, which is re-created by the Spirit, transformed by the divine life, and constituted with the rich element of the processed Triune God by His mingling of Himself with us. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 15, note 1)

The crucial point of Galatians is not God's justification of those who believe but God's creation of them as His new masterpiece of life. Certainly, those who are a new creation are justified by faith, but even more, they are a

constitution of the mingling of the Triune God with redeemed humanity. The crucial difference between the old creation and the new creation is not the matter of redemption from sins but the matter of the impartation of the divine life: "The old creation was old because it did not have God's element; the new creation is new because it has God as its element" (Note 1). The fundamental problem of the old creation is not that it is sinful, although indeed it is, but that it does not contain God. The new creation has God as its content. The Son of God has been revealed in us, Christ lives in us, and He is being formed in us (1:16; 2:20; 4:19). As a new creation, we need to live according to the content of the new creation, that is, according to God as our content. If we turn from Christ to the law, we return to the old creation, thus forsaking our organic union with the Triune God and choosing to live instead by our natural, created life.

Filled unto All the Fullness of God

The book of Ephesians reveals the church as the mystery of Christ, and it presents seven aspects of the church: the Body of Christ, the new man, the kingdom of God, the household of God, the dwelling place of God, the bride of Christ, and the warrior (1:23; 2:15, 19, 21-22; 5:24-25; 6:11-12). Chapters 1 through 3 show the blessings that the church has received in Christ and the position of the church in Christ. The Triune God has blessed the church to the highest degree, gracing her in Christ the Beloved to the extent that she becomes the praise of God's glory (1:6, 12, 14). The church shares with Christ the highest position in the universe, being seated with Him in the heavenlies and being built up in Him into the temple of God, His dwelling place (2:6, 21-22). Chapters 4 through 6 reveal the living and the responsibility that the church bears in the Holy Spirit, which include keeping the oneness of the Spirit (4:1-6) and functioning according to the grace that each member has received for the growth and building up of the Body of Christ (vv. 7-16).

At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul begins to beseech the saints regarding this responsibility but then breaks off, saying, "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship..." (vv. 1-2). In 4:1 he resumes his exhortation to the saints regarding their living and responsibility, saying, "I beseech you therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called." Chapter 3 is a parenthesis that Paul inserts between the two sections of his Epistle. In this parenthesis, Paul presents the stewardship that he has received, and then he offers a deep prayer for the church regarding experience.

Paul's prayer for the church is the heart of this book. He

prays that the Father would strengthen us according to the riches of His glory, that Christ would make His home in our hearts, and that we would apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are (vv. 16-18). These four dimensions are without designation or scale; hence, they are the dimensions of Christ, who is inexhaustible. Yet, we may still apprehend these dimensions by experience. Paul further prays that we would know that which surpasses knowledge—the love of Christ (v. 19). “The love of Christ is Christ Himself. Just as Christ is immeasurable, so also is His love; hence, it is knowledge-surpassing. Yet, we can know it by experiencing it” (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1).

Paul’s ultimate petition in this prayer is that the saints would “be filled unto all the fullness of God” (v. 19). Thus, Paul prays for *the fullness of God*. Many readers of Ephesians confuse the terms *riches* and *fullness*. Ephesians speaks of the riches of God’s grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the riches of the Father’s glory (1:7; 2:7; 3:8; 1:18; 3:16). *Riches* refer to the rich items of the grace, of God’s glory, and of what Christ is to us. When these riches are expressed, they become the fullness. Therefore, the term *fullness* refers not to the riches themselves but to the expression of these riches in those who enjoy and participate in them. By enjoying and experiencing the riches of Christ, we become the fullness of Christ, that is, the expression of Christ (1:22-23). Christ is the fullness of God because He is the embodiment of God who expresses God with all His riches (Col. 1:19; 2:9; John 1:14, 18). Then the church, as the fullness of Christ, becomes the fullness of God by being filled with Christ, as the fullness of God, with all His unsearchable riches.

The term *fullness* also implies a full measure. The experience of the riches of Christ in a meager measure will not result in the fullness of Christ. Hence, Paul also speaks of arriving at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Fullness is something arrived at by being filled unto full measure. As an illustration, there is no fullness with a glass that is half full of water. But when it is filled to its brim, and the water begins to overflow, there is fullness. The believers are not filled with the fullness of God; they are filled unto the fullness of God, that is, unto the full expression of God

with all His riches. The church arrives at the fullness of God by being filled with the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8). Paul was a minister of the gospel to announce these riches, and he prayed that the church would experience them to the uttermost unto the fullness of God.

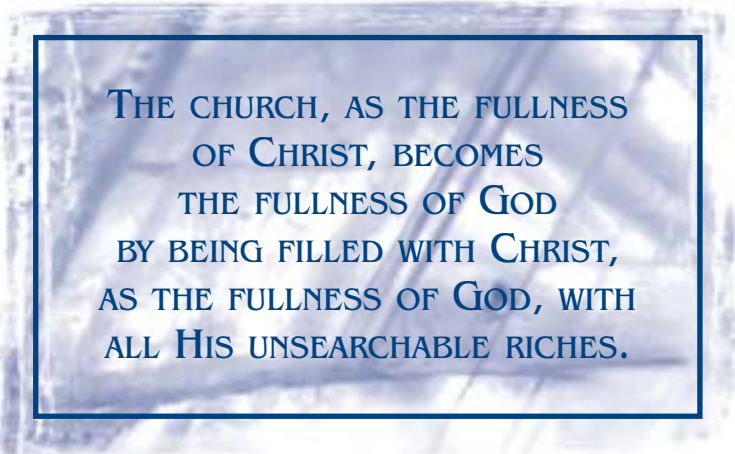
Being filled unto all the fullness of God is to be filled with God as our content unto His full expression. Such fullness cannot be expressed by individuals; it requires “all the saints” (v. 18). Hence, the church is the container of the riches of God unto full expression. In order to know the church as the Body of Christ, we need a revelation of its constitution more than of the relationship between or the function of its members. Likewise, what is crucial for our living in the church and to our bearing responsibility as members of the Body is that we are filled with God unto His fullness. The most crucial point in the book of Ephesians is that the church is a corporate entity filled with all the riches of God unto His full expression.

Able to Do All Things in Him

The book of Philippians speaks of the experience, not the doctrine, of Christ. In Christ Paul was empowered to do all things. He could be

abased—that is, he could be humbled and live in lowly circumstances—and he could abound—that is, he could live in abundance. He could both be filled and hunger; he was content in any circumstance (vv. 11-12). Regardless of circumstances and difficulties, Paul experienced Christ in all things in the course of human living.

Therefore, the phrase *in Him* in verse 13 is a matter of experience, not of doctrine. In 2 Corinthians 12:2 Paul says that he knew “a man in Christ,” who was caught away to the third heaven and into Paradise. This man was Paul himself; he was a person who always sought for others to find him in Christ (Phil. 3:9). When others found Paul, they found a man who lived Christ, not philosophy, culture, the law, or even ethical principles (1:21). They found a man who, although suffering severely in the body, was magnifying Christ by showing Him to be great and without limitation (v. 20). They found a man whose life was according to the pattern of the Lord Jesus, who did not grasp at equality with God but instead emptied Himself, humbling Himself to become a man in the lowest estate and to become obedient to the death of the



cross (2:5-8). Such a life was reproduced in Paul, a life that rejoiced even when others preached Christ for the purpose of adding to his afflictions (1:12-18). When others found Paul, they found a man filled with the enjoyment of the divine life, such that he considered his imminent martyrdom to be a drink offering that he and the Philippians could rejoice over together (2:17-18). They found a man who lived out righteousness, not a self-possessed righteousness according to the law but the righteousness of God on the basis of faith (3:9). They found a man who took Christ as his unique goal and pursued Him in order to gain Him as the prize (v. 14, cf. vv. 8, 12). They found a man not preoccupied with earthly things but rather whose commonwealth was in the heavens, from which he was eagerly expecting Christ's coming (vv. 19-21). They found a man whose life was worthy of consideration and praise because it contained excellent virtues (4:5-9). And finally, they found a man who had learned the secret of contentment in every circumstance, whether in abundance or in lack (vv. 11-12).

At the close of his Epistle, the apostle declares that he was able to do all things in Christ who empowers him. This may be considered "an all-inclusive and concluding word on his experience of Christ" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 13, note 1). In it there are some crucial points. First, this statement is the converse of John 15:5: "Apart from Me you can do nothing," which indicates the believers' organic union with Christ, as illustrated by the union of a branch with the vine (vv. 4-5). This union is in life and of life, the divine life, in which we, the branches, participate in the divine life in Christ, who is lived out and expressed through us as His branches. Paul could do all things, because he was organically joined to Christ who is everything. Second, Paul's word in Philippians 4:13 implies Christ's indwelling, because empowering is an inward matter. The Greek word for *empower* means "to make dynamic inwardly." The footnote in the Recovery Version explains: "Christ dwells in us (Col. 1:27). He empowers us, makes us dynamic from within, not from without. By such inward empowering Paul was able to do all things in Christ" (Phil. 4:13, note 2).

Third, the phrase *I am able to do all things* refers back to verse 11, which says, "Not that I speak according to lack, for I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content." To be content requires satisfaction, which implies enjoyment. According to Philippians the experience of Christ is a matter of enjoying Christ. Thus, this book speaks about partaking and rejoicing. In 1:5 Paul mentions the believers' fellowship unto the furtherance of the gospel, indicating their participation in the gospel. In verse 7 he says that the believers are partakers with him of grace. Joy and rejoicing in the Lord are mentioned frequently throughout the book (vv. 4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 28-29; 3:1; 4:1, 4). To partake of something with joy

is to enjoy that thing. Paul experienced Christ by enjoying Him; hence, he was always rejoicing. Moreover, Paul wanted to gain Christ to the uttermost (3:8). "To gain something requires the paying of a price. To gain Christ is to experience, enjoy, and take possession of all His unsearchable riches (Eph. 3:8) by paying a price" (Lee, Recovery Version, Phil. 3:8, note 6).

In order to enjoy Christ we need to locate Him. Philippians 4:23 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." In 1:19 Paul expected that he would experience a wonderful salvation to live Christ and magnify Him through the saints' petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. At the end of this book he says that the grace of Christ is with our spirit. For Paul, the experience and enjoyment of Christ are a matter of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and our human spirit. In resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit, and the Spirit is now the consummation of the Triune God (1 Cor. 15:45; John 7:39; Rom. 8:9-11). Our spirit has been regenerated by the Spirit, who now indwells us (John 3:6; Rom. 8:9, 11). The Spirit is with our human spirit, and the two spirits are mingled as one spirit (John 4:24; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17). In our mingled spirit we can enjoy Christ and experience Him as the all-sufficient grace to live and magnify Him in all things (2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 1:19-21).

Christ Is All and in All

All refers to all the members in the new man. Christ is all the members, and He is in all the members. Since Christ is the constituent of the new man, and we are the new man, we and Christ are one. This is the crucial point in Colossians. In order to be impressed with the significance of this fact, we need to know the revelation of Christ in Colossians. Whereas Ephesians reveals the Body as the fullness of Christ, Colossians reveals the profoundness of Christ as the Head of the Body (1:18). In Colossians Christ is revealed as the Head so that we may know what He is to us, the members of His Body. The Christ in Colossians is all-inclusive and unlimited. He is the allotted portion of the saints, typified by the land of Canaan as the portion of the children of Israel for their full supply and satisfaction (v. 12; Deut. 8:7-10). He is God, as the image of the invisible God and the One in whom all the fullness of God abides and remains (Col. 1:15, 19). He is the Firstborn of all creation, and a man in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells (v. 15; 2:9). In Him all the creation came into existence; through Him it continues to exist. Everything is unto Him, and everything coheres in Him (1:16-17). He is also the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn in resurrection; therefore, in all things He is preeminent (v. 18). He is the mystery revealed in the stewardship of God, which is to dispense Christ into us

so that we may make known the riches of the glory of this mystery (vv. 25-27). He is the mystery of God, the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (2:2-3). Furthermore, He is the reality of all the shadows, including the items related to the ceremonial law, such as eating and drinking, feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths (vv. 16-17). Hence, He is the reality of every positive thing in the universe; everything is but a shadow of Him (cf. John 4:10; 8:12; 10:7).

Such an all-inclusive and unlimited Christ has come to dwell in us as our life to be our all-inclusive portion (Col. 1:27; 3:4; 1:12). In comparison to Him, what worth has any earthly, material thing or person? Philosophy, tradition, and the elements of the world (the rudimentary teachings of both Jews and Gentiles) that compose human culture should not hold sway over us (2:8). Instead, we must inwardly affirm that we are made full and complete only in Christ, who is the fullness of the Godhead, and that we have died with Him to all these elements (vv. 9, 20). Paul's intention in writing Colossians was to impress the believers with the fact that Christ is everything. Jewish believers need to forget their ordinances and observances, and Gentile believers need to lay aside their philosophical concepts. As believers, we have been raised together with Christ so that we may seek the things above, where Christ is; that is, we may seek all the riches of the resurrected and ascended Christ who is our portion (3:1). This Christ is not only in the heavens. He is in us to be our life, and He is growing in us, saturating and permeating us, until eventually we will be manifested with Him in glory when He comes (v. 4; 1:27-28).

Because Christ is all and in all in the new man, there is no room for Greek and Jew, for any kind of religion, for culture, or for any distinctions based on social status. Indeed, there is no place for any person or any thing. Christ must be every person, as He is in every person (3:10-11). "The new man is Christ constituted into us. On the one hand, the new man is Christ; on the other hand, we, the believers, are the new man. For this reason, in the new man, Christ and we are one" (Lee, *Colossians* 250). The ultimate goal of God in His economy is to gain the new man constituted with the preeminent, all-inclusive Christ wrought into a corporate people. May we all have such a high view of God's economy.

Conclusion

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians present four crucial points. Galatians reveals that we have become a new creation with God as our content through our organic union with Christ. Ephesians reveals that the church as the Body of Christ becomes the fullness of God by being filled with the unsearchable riches of Christ. Philippians reveals that we can experience and enjoy Christ, who indwells us, in every circumstance in order to live and magnify Christ. Colossians reveals that Christ, who is all-inclusive and unlimited, is the Head of the Body and the constituent of the new man, proving that the new man is one with Christ.

The sequence of these four books is also very meaningful for our Christian experience. First, according to Galatians, we enter into an organic union with Christ by faith to

be the new creation. This organic union produces the church as the Body of Christ, the new creation. According to Ephesians, the Body of Christ becomes the fullness of God by being filled with the unsearchable riches of Christ. According to Philippians, the church is filled with Christ's unsearchable riches as we experience and enjoy Him. Ultimately, according to Colos-

sians, our experience of Christ will lead us to know Him as the Head, who is all-inclusive and unlimited. We must hold the Head so that out from Him all the Body may grow with the growth of God (2:19).

The central vision revealed in this cluster of books is a vision of Christ as the Head and the church as His Body. These books reveal Christ in a full way and also reveal that we are joined to Him inwardly and organically so that God may be our content. When we experience and enjoy Christ, who is indwelling us, the result will be the church as the fullness of God. This is the heart of the divine revelation in the New Testament.

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