

CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL

THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST ALL AND IN ALL

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Colossians 1:15-23—Who [the Lord Jesus] is image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation; because by [in] him [in the original it is in Him] were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities: all things have been created by him and for him. And he is before all, and all things subsist together by him. And he is the head of the body, the assembly [the church]; who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that he might have the first place in all things: for in him all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell, and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross—by him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, yet now has it reconciled in the body of his flesh through death; to present you holy and unblamable and irreproachable before it, if indeed ye abide in the faith founded and firm, and not moved away from the hope of the glad tidings, which ye have heard, which have been proclaimed in the whole creation which is under heaven, of which I Paul became minister.

Colossians 2:9-10a—For in him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in him.

Colossians 3:11—Wherein there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is everything [all things], and in all.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, as we gather here our hearts are full of gratitude. Thou hast been good to us; Thou hast led us to this time. We praise and thank Thee for Thy presence with us, for in Thy presence is fullness of joy. We rejoice in the fact that Thy heart is towards us because Thou dost want us to be brought into the fullness of Thy own Son. Thou dost want us to be the fullness of Thy Son. So dear Lord, as we gather here we do ask Thee to enlarge our capacity. Thou knowest that our capacity is very, very limited. Thou art the unlimited God, and it is Thy good pleasure that we may experience the fullness of Thy Son. So Lord, enlarge our capacity that we may be able to see Thee in a fuller way. And this is not to please ourselves; this is to please Thee. We commit this time into Thy hand and we look to Thee to bless us. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

ALL THINGS WILL REFLECT GOD'S SON

We are considering this theme—Christ is all and in all. We do hope this is not just a slogan among us but that by the grace of God we may experience the fullness of Christ. Before the foundation of the world God made a wonderful, glorious will, and

it was made according to His good pleasure. This is something that pleases Him very much, and out of that will He began to create, to redeem, and to reconcile all things back to Christ. He wants to sum up or gather up all things in Christ Jesus. We may put it another way: He wants to see that everything reflects His beloved Son. His Son characterizes everything and is the principle behind everything. Now why is it so? It is because the Bible tells us: "All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in His Son bodily."

THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD

Who can fathom the fullness of the Godhead? When we think of God's love, can we measure it? When we think of God's righteousness, who can understand it fully? When we think of God's holiness, it is beyond our understanding. When we think of God's power, it is immeasurable. And we can go on and on because our God is infinite. He is infinite in love, in holiness, in righteousness, in power and authority. This is the fullness of the Godhead, and it dwells in His beloved Son; but we cannot comprehend the fullness that is in Christ Jesus. And thank God that He gave His Son to us. When you come to God and ask for anything, if it is not asking for something of His Son, God says, "I have nothing to give." This is the fullness of the Godhead that dwells in Christ bodily, and it is the will of God that we should be complete in Him. So this is why the eternal purpose of God is so essential. It is the only way that God will deal with us. It is only as we are in God's will that it can be counted for eternity. Otherwise, everything is vanity and vanity. You may get the whole world and be outside of Christ. It is absolutely nothing before God. Your life is a waste; it is outside of God's will.

So this eternal purpose of God is not just a beautiful thought. It is more than a noble idea. It is real; it is true; it is living; it is eternal, and it governs everything. It governs your life and mine; it means either death or eternal life. This is how important the eternal purpose of God is to us. I hope every one of us will ask ourselves one question: Do I live today in the eternal purpose of God? Or am I outside of that will? That will not only determines the kind of life we are living today; it will also determine our eternal destiny. So this is how essential that Christ is everything and in all.

THE EXPERIENTIAL SIDE OF CHRIST ALL AND IN ALL

Now we would like to fellowship together on the meaning of Christ being all and in all. We do not want to approach it from the theological standpoint although truth is basic. If it is outside of truth it is outside of God. But on the basis of that eternal truth we would like to approach it from the experiential side with the truth behind us. In other words, we do not want to approach it from the objective truth; we want to approach it from the experiential side. In other words, how can we enter into this experience of having Christ all and in all to us?

What is the experience of a Christian life? On what basis is that life? How do we know that we are growing in spiritual life? Now we know that God is not only truth, He is also love. Truth is what He is; love is what He lives. So we would like to see how we can experience Christ all and in all in our daily life. To put it in another way,

in I Corinthians 8 it talks about knowledge and love, and it says, “We know, (for we all have knowledge: knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. If any one think he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know it. But if any one love God, he is known of him)” (1b-3).

TWO KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

There are two kinds of knowledge. One kind is what we will call mental knowledge. Basically, it comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of course, among all the knowledge in the world there is none higher than moral knowledge or ethics. But such knowledge comes from our soul. Such knowledge is gathered together from outside. It makes us knowledgeable, but oftentimes the more knowledgeable we are the more proud we are. Such knowledge puffs us up, but love edifies. Love will really bring us into what God has made for us.

ALL ARE REBELS BEFORE GOD

So we would like to approach this matter of Christ all and in all from the side of love. We all know that we were once sinners. We were rebels before God, but because of the mercy of God, in His great love He has loved us. We were like the prodigal son. He wanted his father’s property but not his father. He had no love for his father, only his property. He took the property that was assigned to him and went to a far country to enjoy it. But he enjoyed himself in such a way that he wasted all his property. And providentially, there was a famine and he had nothing to eat. So he went to a good man and asked him for help, and he told him he could watch the swine. But he was so hungry that he tried to eat what the swine was eating, and then he woke up.

GOD KISSES OUR STIFF NECK

Brothers and sisters, this is your picture and mine. We do not wake up until we suffer. But thank God the son woke up and went back to his father. After the son left home the father thought of him every day. Not only did he think of him, but he would go to the door looking for his son. And then the prodigal son returned home, and we know that the first thing the father did was to kiss his neck to soften it because he was a stiff-necked person. This is our past history. We were all stiff-necked, but the love of God kissed us and softened us, and this is how our Christian life began.

After our neck has been kissed, what will we do? Was this enough? Did we think: “Now I can enjoy the Father’s prosperity; now I will not be in lack.” No, every one who has had his neck kissed will have in his heart a desire to know the Father. There is supernaturally naturally a love to know Him more, to be closer to Him.

THE VIRGIN LONGS FOR HER BRIDEGROOM

When King Solomon wrote the Song of Songs, he told how a virgin longed for her bridegroom and prayed: “Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth.” The Bible never calls people in the world virgins because in the sight of God people in the world are

adulterers and adulteresses. Only those who are saved by grace are called virgins. Just as the apostle Paul said, "I have engaged you as chaste virgins to Christ."

We are all virgins in the sight of God. And the heart of a virgin is to know her lover more, and not only to have a kiss on the neck but an even closer kiss—mouth to mouth because His love is better than wine. His name is like ointment poured forth. Every believer has a heart for the Lord. If you do not have a heart for the Lord you are not a believer. Your belief is probably just mental. You are not really saved by grace. Every one who is saved by grace, the life within them creates a life of love, and supernaturally naturally we love the Lord, and we will love to be close to Him. We want to know His character and do things to please Him. It is a supernaturally natural thing, and it is the proof of our salvation. And because there is such a longing towards the Lord, of course our Lord will respond to us.

THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FLOCK

But this virgin discovered one thing. As she began to have a closer walk with the Lord her brothers took notice of her and said if you really loved the Lord you took care of these flocks and did this work. They wanted her to keep their vineyards and neglect hers, and because of all these works she was black. Nevertheless, she told the Lord, "I am black but inside I am really lovely. Where do you keep Your flock at noontime? I do not want to stay with the flocks of Your companions. I want to be in the flock that You shepherd." And because of her desire for the Lord He said, "If you want to find where I am, look for the footsteps of my flock."

Throughout the centuries God has left the footsteps of His flock, and there you can find Him. This virgin so longed for the Lord Himself, and He began to work in her life. It is just like the apostle Paul said in Philippians 3: "to know Him." Our Christian life begins with "to know Him." We want to know *Him*; we want to understand His nature and His character; we want to be closer to Him; we want to be like Him. And this is what God has put in our hearts. So from the very beginning of our Christian life God has already put this standard in us—Christ all and in all to us. Otherwise, where does this desire come from? This life that has been given to us is the life of Christ, and this life has to grow until we are matured in Christ Jesus, until Christ is all and in all to us. It is not just something we have heard. It is something implanted in each of our hearts, and we are to follow this inward way of life. Then we will grow in Christ—all and in all to us.

Unfortunately, today Christians are being led into an outward way of life, being taught of this and taught of that. In other words, we fall back into the Old Covenant of law, and it is a painful life and full of failure. But there is something already implanted in us. If we can follow that inward way of life then we will grow spiritually because love edifies.

THE CROSS AS THE WAY OF LIFE

Then we find as this virgin began to have a closer life with the Lord she began to realize the cross of our Lord Jesus. As the apostle Paul says to the Corinthians: "I know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (see I Corinthians 2:2). We know that in the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus, the cross is not only something

that our Lord has done for us but the cross is the way of life God has ordained for us. We must deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow the Lord.

KNOWING THE CROSS

So this virgin began to know something of the cross. But we know that when one begins to know the cross, he or she begins to look more into self. So we find that she was in the cleft of the rock, and she had a deeper knowledge of the Lord. She was willing to walk the way of the cross, but she became so inward that the Lord had to draw her out. In other words, to know Him she must follow the power of His resurrection. So during that period of her life with the Lord we find her saying in chapter 2 of Song of Songs: “My beloved is mine and I am His” (v. 16). In other words, the beloved is mine. I am still the center, but I also know I am His. It is more of self and less of Christ.

This is the danger of knowing the cross. Unconsciously, we think more of ourselves: “I am enough!”—instead of thinking more of the Lord. So we find in the story in Song of Songs, the Lord was trying to draw her out to bring her to the place of resurrection. At first she could not follow until she realized it seemed as if she had lost the Lord. Then she rose up and followed the Lord.

Thus, in the pathway of love we begin with the cross. From the cross we enter into knowing the power of His resurrection, and it is only then that you gradually become more and more like Him. Then in the Song of Songs, chapter 6, she says, “I am my beloved and my beloved is mine” (v. 3). Here we find the degree is changed. Instead of herself being first, Christ is first; but He is also mine. So it is more of Christ and less of self.

But as she continued to grow in this life of love you find she was conformed to the death of Christ. The stature of Christ began to increase in her life, and it grew until the time when she could say in chapter 7: “I am my beloved and his desire is towards me” (v. 10). Now it is all of Christ and none of self. So this is the way of love and this is the way we enter into Christ all and in all to us.

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF OUR LIFE ON EARTH

We would like to apply this to various aspects of our life. Generally speaking, our life on earth is composed of four dimensions. Number one is personal life; number two is family life; number three is social life; and number four is church life. So generally, we find the way we live on this earth has these four dimensions.

Personal Life

First is the personal life—how Christ is all and in all in our personal life. Can we say before the Lord, so far as our personal life is concerned, that Christ is all and in all to us? There is a good example of this, and it is F. B. Meyer who was a famous minister. When he was young, he was a pastor in Leicester, and some Cambridge graduates visited him. One was C. T. Studd who was *the* cricketer in England. At that time there were seven Cambridge graduates going to China as missionaries, and before they went to China they traveled around England, Scotland, and so forth.

F. B. Meyer

C. T. Studd and another fellow graduate stayed with F. B. Meyer when he was in Leicester, and it was very cold. Early in the morning F. B. Meyer noticed that the light in C. T. Studd's room was on. So as the host he was a little concerned that something was wrong, but it was too early to knock on the door. He waited and waited and noticed that the light was still on. Finally, he could not wait any longer and he knocked on the door. He heard a voice saying to come in. So he went into the room and saw C. T. Studd wrapped up in a rug because it was cold, reading the Bible. So F. B. Meyer said, "You are up early." And C. T. Studd said, "I love the Lord, and I am searching the Scriptures. I want to find His commands that I may obey Him."

When we are searching the Scriptures, we are looking for promises, not commands. And people get so lazy. They have a promise box and just pick a promise for the day. But C. T. Studd was different. He searched the Scriptures for God's commandments that he may obey. So F. B. Meyer said, "You have something I do not have. What is the secret?"

And C. T. Studd said, "Have you consecrated yourself to God?" Now to ask a pastor such a question was an insult.

F. B. Meyer said, "Of course, I have consecrated myself."

But C. T. Studd said, "Have you gone to the Lord and handed over your life, one point after another to Him?"

And F. B. Meyer said, "I have not done that."

So C. T. Studd said, "Go and do it."

F. B. Meyer went to his room and tried to hand over one point after another to the Lord. He had a bundle of keys to all the rooms of his life but he kept for himself one little key to a small room. The Lord stretched out His hand and he gave the bundle of keys to the Lord. And the Lord shook His head, no. F. B. Meyer said, "I have just kept a small key. If You allow me to keep it I will serve You with double effort." The Lord would not bargain with him. And this is the word the Lord spoke to him: "If I am not Lord of all, I am not Lord at all." The Lord began to turn away, and out of his desperation F. B. Meyer cried out: "Make me willing to be willing. I am not willing but make me willing to be willing." And the Lord turned back and took that little key. God began to search him in every area of his life, and he later was greatly used. Brothers and sisters, how about our lives?

Watchman Nee

Here is another story and it is about Watchman Nee. He was saved when he was nineteen. After he was saved he really had a heart for the Lord, and he tried to preach to his fellow students. But he did it in such a way that his fellow students began to avoid him. When they saw him coming, they said, "The preacher is coming," and they went the other way. One day he met a missionary, Miss Groves. (I know her.) Miss Groves asked him, "How many people have been saved since you believed in the Lord?" And he said, "None; but I have done my duty." So Miss Groves asked him: "Have you ever prayed for them?" He said, "Never." And she said, "You had better pray for them first." So he put the names of these fellow students in his book, and he began to pray for them every day, and within a short time many were saved.

One day as he was going to preach, his heart was turned to Psalm 73:25: "Whom have I in the heavens? and there is none upon earth I desire beside Thee." He wanted to preach that message but to be honest before God he had to say, "Lord, I cannot do that. I can say, Whom do I have in the heavens?" But I cannot say, "There is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." And it was because he loved a lady. They grew up together and had a kind of understanding that one day they would be united in one. After he was saved he tried to convince the lady to be saved, but he could talk with her about anything except the Lord. She refused to believe in the Lord. So the Lord began to work in his life until one day the love of Christ constrained him and he said, "Lord, if you allow me to have her I am willing to go to Tibet." But the Lord said, "No." Finally, he was so constrained by the love of Christ that he gave that lady up. Then he changed his clothes, took the paste, and went out to the streets and put up gospel posters. That was his farewell to her. But there is a good ending to this story. A number of years later that lady got saved. She was the queen in Yan Jing University, but the Lord saved her, and eventually gave her back to him. That was Charity.

Is Christ all and in all in your life? Do you love Him more than anything else? Sooner or later the Spirit of Christ will prove your life. Our God is a jealous God; He will not allow us to have anything in our lives higher than Him. He wants to deliver us from everything that is not of Him so that He can fill us with Himself. In our personal life is He all and in all to us? You do not need to search yourself; the Holy Spirit in you will do the work, and when He is doing that work in you, He will give you the love of Christ to so constrain you that you are able to overcome.

Family Life

The second area of our life is family life. Thank God for the family. The Bible tells us that His salvation is for the family. You remember in Acts 16 when Paul and Silas were in Philippi. They were put in jail and at midnight they prayed and praised God. The earth quaked and all the doors in the jail were opened. When the jailer woke up, he thought all the prisoners had escaped, so he tried to kill himself. And Paul said, "We are all here." So he went to Paul and Silas and said, "How can I be saved?" And Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved and your family." In other words, if you believe you will be saved, but God will also give you the family. If you are faithful God will give the whole family to you. So the Bible tells us that there is household salvation. Sometimes our family members are not saved, and it is either because we do not have a good testimony or we do not pray before the Lord. If we have faith God will honor it.

I think one thing we lack very much in our modern families is the family altar because everybody is so busy. When I was a boy, my father gathered us seven children every day before supper for a family altar. He would read from the Bible and we would all kneel down and he would pray for us. I can never forget that. Today we neglect the family altar. I do hope that we will restore it. A family who prays together will be united together.

We remember Joshua in chapter 24 when he told the children of Israel: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Neither can I forget Hudson Taylor's

family, because for generations they served the Lord. So I hope that our family life will really allow Christ to be all and in all. When I came to this country, I discovered that Christians in this country emphasized the family very much. In China in my day we emphasized church life very much. We had meetings almost every night, and we neglected our family. But in this country they looked to the family as everything, and it affected their spiritual life. So maybe we need a balance here. Let our family life grow by God. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.

Social Life

Then there is the social life. We find in John 17 that the Lord taught us about our relationship with this world. We are in the world but not of the world. We are separated from the world, yet the Lord sends us back to the world to be a testimony to Him. So it is very important that we know our relationship with the world. Love not the world or the things of the world. If you love the world the love of the Father is not in you, and yet we have a commission to the world. We are to testify to them of our Lord Jesus.

Church Life

Finally, of course, there is church life. Church life is important. God has gathered us together that we may be built up together as the body of Christ. So you find in Hebrews 10:25: "Do not forsake the gathering of the saints." We should not be individualistic. We need God and we need one another. We need to gather together, encourage one another, and build up one another until the fullness of Christ is revealed. So Christ all and in all is not just a truth; God wants us to experience it, and He will do it. So may we open ourselves to Him, and let the Spirit within us lead us that we may really grow in Christ and allow Him to be all and in all.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for Thy wonderful will for us. Thou dost not want us to be anything less than what Thou want us to be. And Thou hast made every provision for us. Teach us how to cast ourselves upon Thee and allow Thee to lead us on until Christ be all and in all to us to the praise of God. We ask in Thy name. Amen.