

Colossians: Full Part 4: Fullness in Heart

Colossians 4:15-18

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on October 15th, 2023

What Size Heart do You Have?

For anyone who claims Christ as Savior, there are two distinct paths forward in life. The difference between the two paths is the choice you make as to the size of your heart.

You can choose to cultivate a small heart. That is the easiest and safest life, to be sure. A small heart minimizes the sorrows of life. If your goal is to remain comfy and cozy and try to avoid any pain, discomfort or troubles in life, the formula is simple: steer clear of relationships and friendships, do not give yourself to people and share your life with them, and be sure to carefully avoid elevated and noble ideals. Do those things and you will escape a plethora of afflictions and trouble. Many people, even those who profess to be Christian, get through life with a minimum of tribulation by having small hearts.

The other option is to cultivate a ministering heart like that of the Apostle Paul. To do this, you must open yourself to others and become susceptible to an index of sadness, sorrow, pain and loss that is scarcely imaginable to a shriveled heart. Also, a full heart beats with the gospel of Jesus Christ and with a sense of urgency to put that message first and foremost in each relationship. Be convinced by the gospel, be open to others, and you are certainly bringing the potential for pain into your life.

These two kinds of hearts affect others in drastically different ways. Even though they are safe and protected, little hearts do not contribute anything. No one benefits from the restricted sympathies and lack of vision from little-hearted people. On the other hand, large hearts, though vulnerable, also know the most joy and leave the greatest impact on other hearts. Cultivate a small heart and, though life may seem to be smooth sailing, you will never know the power of the Holy Spirit in your sails, or the exhilaration of being carried along by the Spirit, accomplishing great eternal things for God. Cultivate a small heart and you certainly will never have a great heart like the apostle Paul's.

As we come to the final paragraph of the book of Colossians, we need to remind ourselves that Paul was under house arrest in Rome,

chained to a Praetorian guard night and day. His feet, which had walked almost the length of the Roman Empire, could now scarcely find room to pace. His eyes, which were always on the gentile world, were now restricted to four walls. But his great heart, though caged in prison, would continue to mark the world as Paul wrote some of the most powerful parts of the Holy Scriptures.

Over 1,000 miles away, a similar heart beat inside a man named Epaphras. He was a leader in a tiny house church in Colossae. Epaphras had probably come to know Christ when Paul was ministering in Ephesus and had gone back to the Lycus Valley where God used him to bring the good news to its towns. People were coming to Christ regularly and the fruit of the Spirit were evident amongst the people.

But there were dark forces at work. Men and women began to attend their fellowship who brought with them an intimidating air of superiority. They explained that they liked what they saw in the church, because it was a promising beginning to a deeper, more fulfilling knowledge of God. They explained that Christ could not be the Creator, and his incarnation at best was an illusion, because God could not touch physical matter. The way to a true knowledge of God's fullness was by using esthetic disciplines and secret passwords to work one's way up a long series of emanations until they finally reached God. This heresy was so intellectual and appealing, some of the Colossians were led away from their fullness to the desolation of Gnosticism. Epaphras did his best against this heresy, but he needed Paul's help. So he decided to seek the Apostle out in Rome.

No one knows exactly how Epaphras found Paul, but we can surmise that their meeting was emotional and intense as Epaphras poured out his concern to the chained apostle. The effect on Paul was completely predictable, as it always is with those who have enlarged hearts. Epaphras's concern became Paul's. A wonderful Apostolic anxiety engulfed Paul's heart, as was common with him: "And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?" said Paul to the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 11: 28-29). To the Galatians he said, "I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain" (Galatians 4: 11). Out of the same concern, Paul once sent a friend to the Thessalonians to find out about their faith, afraid that the Tempter may have tempted them, and Paul's work would have been in vain (1 Thessalonians 3:5).

Paul's brilliant, original intellect began to analyze the Colossian problem: Here is a little church overflowing with the joy of new faith, and now comes some desolating philosophy that, ironically, is luring people away from their fullness in Christ by promising a bogus fullness! Paul prayed and meditated, and when his heart and mind were full, he called for his secretary and began to dictate a letter. During the next hours, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul gave the world the beautiful letter to the Colossians, a letter written to perpetuate both the Colossian's fullness and ours, too. (read text)

Paul's Full-Hearted Argument

Paul began, in the opening verses, with a celebration of the miracle of the tiny Colossian church, a church that he had never seen. He especially celebrated the gospel, which had produced the remarkable faith, hope, and love of the new church.

Paul followed with a prayer for the Colossians' knowledge (1:9-14). The Gnostics had promoted their knowledge as the way of fullness. So Paul prayed for the knowledge of Christ for the Colossians. Specifically, he prays "that they may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" (vv. 9-10).

Having finished his prayer, he went on in verses 15-18 to give the most stupendously full revelation of Christ to be found in any of the epistles. It was a sublime poem/hymn of Christ's supremacy that speaks for itself:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

According to this, Paul gives four ways Christ is first place:

1. He is the "firstborn over all creation." In Hebrew thought this means *first in rank or honor*. He is completely supreme in creation. There is none higher; There is no Gnostic god above him. One day every knee will bow to the name of Jesus, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2: 10, 11).

2. He is supreme because He is Creator: “For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through him and for him” (v. 16). He created the invisible spirit world. He created the vast physical world. Einstein estimated that there are 10 octillion stars in the universe. How many is that? Well, 1000 thousands make one million; 1000 millions make 1 billion; 1000 billions make one trillion; 1000 trillions make one quadrillion; 1000 quadrillions make one quintillion; 1000 quintillions make one sextillion; 1000 sextillion S make one septillion; 1000 make one octillion. 10 octillion! 10 followed by twenty-seven zeroes! Jesus created them all. He created the unseen microcosms, the incredible rainbow, the beauty of the cell, and he did it all out of nothing. He did it all by the word of his power.

3. He is the Sustainer of creation: “He is before all things, and by him all things hold together” (v. 17). The perfect tense here tells us that he continues to hold all things together, and that apart from his continuous activity everything would disintegrate. He holds every speck of matter and every nonmaterial spirit together. He is not contained in matter but holds it together by his word. The Gnostics never dreamed of a God like this.

4. He is the Goal of creation: “all things have been created through him and for (toward) him” (V. 16). All creation is moving toward its goal in Christ. All things sprang forth at his command, and all things will return to him at his command. He is the beginning, and he is the end.

What we think about Christ is everything. If you believe that Christ is eternal, without beginning and without end, that he always was continuing; If you believe that he is Creator of everything, every cosmic spec across trillions of lightyears of trackless space, the Creator of textures and shapes and colors that dazzle our eyes; If you believe that he is the sustainer of all creation, the force that is presently holding the universe together, and that without him all would dissolve; if you believe that he is the goal of everything, that all creation is moving toward him; If you believe all of this, nothing much can go wrong with you. We cannot think too highly of Jesus Christ.

This is the heart of the book of Colossians. Everything else flows from it, because Christ is the one who “fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23). Christ's fullness makes full reconciliation possible,

“for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things... making peace by the blood of the cross” (Colossians 1:19-20). Christ’s fullness makes it possible for his blood to reconcile all who trust him, and to make the redemption of creation possible. His fullness makes the ministry of the gospel supreme (1:24-29). Christ’s fullness motivates Paul’s concern for the Colossians (2:1-5) and influences Paul’s charge to walk in Christ (2:6-7).

Now Paul warned them not to fall captive to nastic foolishness, and then gave a rationale based on Jesus’s fullness: “for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him” (2:9-10). Christ is full with all the fullness of deity, and we, as Christians, are full of his fullness. Therefore, we have to open our lives up more and more so we can receive this fullness. We have to cultivate an elasticity of the soul. That is an antidote to dull insipid boring selfish Christianity.

In the remainder of chapter 2, Paul explained more of the dynamics of this fullness (v. 11-15) and successfully warned them against Gnostic legalism, mysticism, and asceticism.

Colossians 3:1-4 is the high point of exhortation in the letter:

so if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory.

Our minds and hearts must consistently be focused upward. We cannot be too heavenly minded. Sometimes we hear people say, “he is so heavenly minded, he’s no earthly good.” But they’re wrong. He may be so self-righteous, so pious, so “goody-goody,” but never too heavenly minded. This is, I believe, what made Paul stand above even the other apostles. He wrote, “I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago was caught up to the 3rd heaven - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - and I know that this man was caught up into paradise - whether in body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Paul was the man in this vision, but he humbly used the third person. This experience marked his life with the eternal, and it made him different.

As Joe Bayly expressed it, “Lord burn eternity into my eyeballs.” Only when it is this way, when we are consumed with things that matter eternally, can we really live. “Then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Paul followed this with marvelous practical exhortations regarding putting off the old man and putting on the new (3:5-14). In 3:15 - 4:1, Paul issued a series of challenges for church and family. His rationale was sublime: since Christ is the *cosmic* fullness, he is also the one who brings relational, *domestic* fullness to our lives. We ought to live in the fullness of his peace, his word, and his name (v. 15-17). This cosmic fullness must bring domestic fullness to husband and wife (v. 18-19), parents and children (v. 20-21), and employers and employees (3:22-4:1). When all are tuned to him, we are automatically tuned to each other. If we all are receiving direction from the same Conductor, the music we play should be in harmony.

Finally, this fullness brings fullness of communication with God in prayer and fullness of communication with the world (4:2-6).

All ended his letter by elaborating the fullness of fellowship with believers and the final greeting. Now we will take a brief look at those final greetings, Paul's personal salutation.

Paul's Full-Hearted Conclusion

Paul's final greeting was a three-part encouragement. First, in 4:15: “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.” Paul had never been to Laodicea either, but his large-heartedness compelled him to greet the church there and the woman, Nympha, who so graciously hosted it.

Second, in verse 16: “After this letter has been read at your gather, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.” Paul encouraged in exchange of the letters he was sending to Laodicea and Colossae. He wanted them read aloud *as Scripture*. We know that in the future, Laodicea would need all the help it could get, as it became a church that was neither hot nor cold and was rejected by Christ (Revelation 3:14-22).

Third, in verse 17 he encouraged a young leader in the Colossian church: “And tell Archippus, ‘Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it.’” From Philemon 2 many deduced that Archippus was the son of Philemon and Apphia. Perhaps Epaphras told the Apostle of Archippus’s budding spiritual life and potential. At any rate, Paul reminded him that his ministry originated “in the Lord.” It was divinely given and must be treated as such. Paul told him that he must “fulfill” it, calling to mind for the final time the grand theme of fullness.

For perhaps an hour now Paul had been caught up in the sublime themes of Colossians. But now he stretched out his hand for the stylus to write his last words, and as he did so, the chain that fastened him to the Praetorian guard at his side hindered him. He was reminded of his prison. The exhaustion after such an hour of high communion made him consciously dependent, and all his profound teaching, all his thundering and lightning, ended in the simple cry that goes straight to the heart: “I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you” (v. 18).¹

Paul was in jail, but no power on earth could cage his soaring heart. He had made himself vulnerable and thus knew deep miseries. But he also knew the winds of the Holy Spirit in his sails, and he had been flying.

Paul closed with the Apostolic benediction, “Grace be with you.” A closing word of grace was the trademark of Paul in all his letters. “May God's unmerited, freely given favor rest on you.” The communication of God's grace to a needy, sinful world is the focus of God's deeds, and it is the focus of this letter. The Apostle John put it this way: “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth...for from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:14-16).

Have you received Christ’s fullness? If not, would you be willing to say to the Lord, “Here's my cup, Lord; Fill it up, Lord.” May we hold the miracle of being filled with the fullness of God high before us. May we seek those things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. There is more fullness for our lives as we open our lives more fully to him. May we experience that and may the theme of this great letter be burned into our hearts. May we be filled to overflowing with Jesus Christ.

¹ Alexander MacLaren, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*, The Expositor’s Bible (New York: A.C. Armstrong, 1903), p.411.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY: Monday October 23 at 6:30PM at Pastor Craig's home. We are going through the book of Ephesians. All men are welcome!

Wednesday Morning Bible Study at 10:30AM. Our study continues in Mark.

FBC Kids Wednesday Nights. 6-7:30PM See Pastor Jason for details!

LIGHT THE NIGHT: October 31. Sign up to volunteer today! We also need prayers for the gospel to be shared, encouraging conversations to be had, and a lot of candy donations! Your help with this is greatly appreciated.

BUSINESS MEETING: October 30th, 6PM. Please get your committee/team/ministry's report turned *in this week!* Email it to contact@fbcmartinsburg.com.

THIS PAST WEEK: SUNDAY 10/8/2023

OFFERING GIVEN: \$5991.46

IN WORSHIP: 143

WEEKLY BIBLICAL COMMUNITY: 206

WELCOME TO THE FIRST BAPTIST FAMILY!

- Eli Daiker (baptism)

- Kaila Lee (baptism)

THIS COMING WEEK: Oct.16-20

OFFICE HOURS THIS WEEK: M-TH: 8AM-2PM, Closed Friday.