

10. Complete in Christ (1Q 2026 Christ in Philippians and Colossians)

Biblical material: Colossians 2; Heb. 7:11; Isa. 61:3; 1 Cor. 3:6; Deut. 31:24–26; Rom. 2:28, 29; Rom. 7:7.

Quotes

- To be complete, is to be furnished with all things necessary for salvation. By this one word complete, is shown that we have in Christ whatever is required. In him, not when we look to Christ, as though he were distant from us, but we are in him, when, by the power of the Spirit, we have faith wrought in our hearts by the Spirit, and we are united to our Head. *Matthew Henry*
- His word says you are Complete in Christ! You are whole! Nothing missing, nothing lost, nothing broken! This is not by your deeds or something you are on your own. This is because you're in Christ! *Bibi Babatunde-Ikotun*
- The indwelling of the divine fullness in Him is characteristic of Him as Christ, from all ages and to all ages. Hence the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him *before* His incarnation.... It dwelt in Him *during* His incarnation.... The fullness of the Godhead dwells *in His glorified humanity* in heaven.... He carried His human body with Him into heaven, and in His glorified body now and ever dwells the fullness of the Godhead. *Martin Vincent*
- The implication of being complete in Christ is that we are incomplete outside of Him. As a result of sin and the curse, mankind is in a state of incompleteness. We are spiritually incomplete, unrighteous, dead in our sins, and separated from the life of God (Eph. 2:1). But when we trust the One Who is the fullness of the Godhead bodily, that He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, we immediately go from incompleteness to being “complete in Him.” “Complete” in Colossians 2:10 means to be made full, to fill to the full. We are made full in Christ. Verse 9 says that “in Him” dwells all fullness of the Godhead bodily. Verse 10 says that “in Him” we find fullness and are made full. There’s no room for anything more and, being in Him, there’s nothing missing. There aren’t any other things to add. Christ makes us whole spiritually. *Kevin Sadler*

Questions

How are we “complete in Christ”? What are the dangers in thinking that “completeness” means “perfection”? How does the concept of being “made full” by God help us here? Why does Paul warn against “philosophy and worthless delusions” in Colossians 2? What lessons can we draw for ourselves from reading this chapter?

Bible summary

The emphasis of Colossians 2 is to focus exclusively on Christ. Hebrews 7:11 point to Jesus as the supreme high priest. God changes our mourning into gladness (see Isaiah 61:3). God is the one who makes us grow, not human beings (see 1 Corinthians 3:6). Deuteronomy 31:24–26 records the completion of the book of the Law. It’s what’s in the inside that counts (see Romans 2:28, 29). Romans 7:7 says that the Law defines sin.

Comment

There is an unfortunate translation issue in Colossians 2:9 and 10 that clouds the right interpretation of what Paul is trying to say. The problem concerns the word “pleroo,” which essentially means to “fill up” or “fill completely.” It can also have the meaning of to “finish,” or “bring to an end.”

Most translations use the sense of “filling” when it comes to Colossians 2:9. For example KJV has “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Similarly NLT has “For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.” But when it comes to Colossians 2:10, they have

respectively, “And ye are complete in him,” and “So you also are complete through your union with Christ.”

However it is the same word *pleroo* Paul uses in both verses, and he is obviously linking the “fullness” of God in Christ, and the “fullness” Christ brings to the believer. This is why I have translated the verses in the FBV as “For the fullness of God’s divine nature lives in Christ in bodily form, and you have been made full in him.” To use “fullness” in one verse and “complete” in the next obscures the connection. This is the sense of how God transforms us. So the title of this lesson is somewhat misleading since it uses a translation that does not connect verse 10 with verse 9.

But let us ask, using those words, what does it mean to be “complete in Christ.” The problem is that we can understand it to mean that the work of sanctification is already finished. But is it not true that this is the work of a lifetime, and that God continues to go on working in us? So what exactly is “complete”?

First, our salvation is “complete.” There is no “add on” that is necessary. It’s not a question of trusting in Jesus plus our works. When Jesus cried out “It is finished!” from the cross, he meant that his mission on earth to represent God was over, and that our salvation was assured.

Second, our connection with God means that we are in the process of being made “complete” in our Christian virtues. Paul wrote to the Ephesians in the same way, using the same word for “fullness,” “May you know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you’re made full and complete by the fullness of God.” Ephesians 3:19.

Thirdly, we are “complete” *only in him*. We cannot point to anything in and of ourselves. It is the graciousness of God brings the transformation, not our self-serving “righteousness.” It is our connection to Jesus that makes us complete, not who we are and what we try to accomplish by ourselves.

In Colossians chapter 2 Paul is concerned that the church in Colossae hold on to the centrality of Christ, and not become distracted by anyone “spinning them a tale,” particularly philosophy or traditions or worldly concepts. What seems to be in view here are both the actions of the “Judaizing party” that wanted Christians to become Jews first, and also the influence of those coming out of pagan religions.

Countering the first of these threats Paul turns to the issue of circumcision. He makes it clear that Christians are “circumcised” or set apart by Christ, and so physical circumcision is no longer required. He also deals with the question of Jewish observances—dietary restrictions, religious festivals, and ceremonial Sabbaths. The word here is in the plural, and clearly is part of the Jewish dispensation that pointed forward to Christ, as Paul says, they “are just a shadow of what was to come.” The weekly Sabbath was never described in this way, but is a memorial of the past (Creation), not of the future.

Paul also notes some other distractions from concentrating on Christ—beating yourself, or the worship of angels. Self-flagellation was a frequent way of trying to “deny the flesh,” (notably in the case of the early Martin Luther). Worship of angels was part of Gnosticism, another Christian heresy of the time. The danger is that we somehow believe we have to add something to the all-encompassing grace of Jesus. This is what I call “Jesus Plus.”

Anything you add to Jesus has the potential to destroy your total trust in him. That’s why Paul wanted to make sure none of his audience added anything—that they were complete in Christ.

Ellen White Comments

As we faithfully continue the work, we shall have high aspirations for righteousness, holiness, and a perfect knowledge of God. In this life we become complete in Christ, and our increased capabilities we shall take with us to the courts above. {CT 18}

In the Word of God duty is made plain, and everything relating to the religious life is presented in a definite way. The whole plan of salvation is delineated, and the helps to the soul are pointed out. The way in which the believer may be complete in Christ is unfolded. {DG 78-9}