

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"



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His Church—His Preeminence

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.
(Colossians 1:18–19)

Listen to people talk, watch their actions, and you will learn how they think. Few professing Christians and fewer yet professing preachers would deny the point Paul makes in this lesson. However, they often deny both the passage and their profession by acting as if they do not believe the passage. Do they act as if they believe that He rules their church and He alone, or do they act as if the church is their personal possession? Do they submit their personal wishes to their brothers and sisters, always preferring others' thoughts and wishes above their own? Isn't this simple behavior what Paul taught in the second chapter of Philippians? We submit to Jesus when we submit to our brothers and sisters, preferring them and their ideas to our own just as Jesus submitted to the Father during the Incarnation. Likewise, we reject Him when we elevate our own ideas above our brothers and sisters. This simple New Testament truth would transform many churches from the power struggle combat they accept as "normal" into a truly heavenly place where Jesus is praised in all things. Effective church leadership and safe, Biblical church culture is not about getting others to do what you want them to do, but about serving others. He alone is the head of any church that claims any legitimate right to say she is His church, and He alone deserves—and receives—the preeminence in such a church.

Let's step back and examine this lesson in its context.

1. In verses twelve through fourteen Paul attributes our redemption, forgiveness, indeed every claim we have on eternal peace with God, to the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. In Verse 15 he affirms that Jesus is the visible expression of God, in every way the physical embodiment of God. He is thus in every way equal with the Father, eternal God, uncreated and sharing fully in every essential attribute of deity. He is superior to all things created, being Himself uncreated and eternal.

3. In verses sixteen and seventeen Paul affirms that He created all things that exist, and the natural creation, created by Him is "...by him and for him."
4. Verse seventeen further affirms that He not only created all things, but that He maintains the creation. "Consist" comes from a New Testament Greek word that means to glue or hold things together in proper relationship.

Thus Paul asserts that Jesus has every right by position, by power—indeed by His being God Incarnate—to fill the role as the head of the church and to receive undivided preeminence in the church.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. Occasionally the Holy Spirit directed the writers of Bible books to make sweeping, comprehensive statements that set us back on our heels and cause us to think long and hard about the reality of God. I believe this is one of those passages.

For it pleased the Father... Don't miss this simple point. Here is something that gave God personal pleasure, pleasure that He shows when His children embrace the same attitude and behaviors as He toward His Son. Every time we read in Scripture of God being pleased, something incredible happens, always very good. Conversely, every time we read in Scripture of God not being pleased, severe judgment falls on those responsible for God's displeasure.

We might consider this verse from any number of perspectives, temporal or eternal. It holds either way. A preacher who abandons his Biblical ministry and begins to build his own personal empire of influence and control over others will soon demonstrate that his "cup" is no longer full. His ministry will shrivel. His preaching vitality will slip into mediocrity. He chose an alternative to the fullness that God vested in His Son, and he shall surely receive his choice. His fullness vanishes. A church may become a social club in which various families or individuals struggle to

win their wishes over others. They may well gain their way for a time, but they shall never manifest the rich fullness of the faith-walk in the Lord Jesus Christ. Regardless of how much they win their own way, they will demonstrate an emptiness that they cannot fill as long as they magnify self and exploit others. Leaders in churches at times become so arrogant that they think God has vested them alone with the decisions for their church, so they barely consult with anyone at all. They simply go through a superficial motion of consulting, but people readily understand that these leaders do not listen at all, so they stop trying. Emptiness shall surely fill that church to overflowing.

Scripture consistently addresses the complex issues of life and simplifies them. Paul didn't set up a complicated scenario with endless alternatives in it. He told us in a straightforward manner what pleases God, and he told us by contrast and omission what does not please God. How often do you encounter someone who describes what they view as a difficult and challenging situation that they cannot work out? They want to do God's will, but they cannot seem to come to peace with what God's will in this particular situation in fact is. If we could analyze all the variables and pertinent facts of their dilemma in light of Scripture, the complexity would vanish. God would in fact answer their dilemma with a clear-cut solution. Could it be? Do we complicate issues so that we can thereby rationalize a course of action other than the Bible's clear answers? "Does my choice or action give preeminence to the Lord Jesus Christ? Have I filtered out of my reasoning any motive or result other than giving Him preeminence in the eventual outcome?" What would happen to our complex problem if we submitted it to these two simple, but highly filtering questions?

According to Paul's inspired words in this verse, where do we find fullness? Where alone do we find it? Our only authentic expectation of fullness, of completeness and satisfaction materialize to the extent to which we abandon self and bow, joyfully, willingly, before Him. During my younger years, Simon and Garfunkel were popular singers. To be honest, I still enjoy listening to them. They often sang about the unrest and other problems in the culture of the day. One of their songs, "Sound of Silence," presents a haunting reminder of issues that grow out of our study verse. The song describes someone walking the streets of a large city. People surround this person. Despite being surrounded by people, this person lives in desperate isolation, loneliness so powerful you can feel it in the words and mood of the song.

Fullness? No, this person experiences profound emptiness.

When God changes us in regeneration, in the new birth, He gives us a measure of His nature, of His moral and spiritual disposition. As Scripture describes an open, intimate, and honest interaction within the Trinity, between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so Scripture teaches that God's children need a similar open, intimate, and honest interaction with others in God's family. Forget your unspoken "agenda." Forget your nicely sterilized, sanitized, Sunday morning façade. Do you not understand that facades, shallow pretenses that people use to cover up their true attitude, are painfully transparent? People may not always know what you are hiding, but they can spot a façade a mile away. Friends, if we have any hope of participating in the endless line of godly, selfless people who live to give God His deserved preeminence, we must move out of our superficial facades and into the transparent light of His glory. Do we live out the Simon and Garfunkel sentiment in our lives? Do we personify the deafening "Sound of Silence"? Or do we live and breathe a lifestyle that selflessly shines the light of our life on the Lord Jesus Christ so as to give Him His deserved preeminence?

When we arise in the resurrection and stand before God beside the Lord Jesus Christ; when we hear Him utter the words "Behold I and the children God hath given me..." (Hebrews 2:13), will we have any concern, any nagging, unfulfilled desire for any preeminence for ourselves? Or will we realize all our fullness and joy in knowing His victory, His accomplishment, His finished and successful work? David wrote, "...I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Psalm 17:15) When that moment comes, when you and I are actually there in our resurrected bodies, shall we be satisfied, or shall we overflow with discontent? Why will that moment give us such satisfaction? Is it not the full realization that He then receives the accolades that He deserves; that the preeminence the Father intended for Him comes to its full expression? If that event brings our moment of full and ultimate satisfaction, why should we expect any satisfaction, any fullness, in this life apart from a similar Christ-centric mindset?

The more people drift away from a Christ-centric life the more empty, unhappy, and unfulfilled they become. And the more they move under the shadow of His loving grace, consciously and actively making decisions and investing their life's energy into things that glorify Him, that give Him full preeminence, the more contented they become. As the cliché goes, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure this one out. So what are we waiting for? What is our next move? What—

no, Who—shall be the primary factor in our next decision, our next action?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday	10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder	Pastor