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FOREWORD

As stated in the FOREWORD to *Scripture Research (SR)*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (published October, 2007), the following three paragraphs are found and still apply:

On the weekend of November 19-20, 2006, Scripture Research, Inc. (SR) held their Fall conference in Riverside, California. The overall theme of this conference was THE *PLEROMA*. Several of SR's Board members prepared messages relating to this grand subject and then delivered the substance of their research endeavors. What a treat to listen to those several presentations.

Some of the PROCEEDINGS of this conference will be formatted into hardcopy and then published in forthcoming issues of *Scripture Research (SR)*. This procedure will obviously interrupt the sequence of republishing of the "old" *SR*'s, but we believe that those of you who will be reading this series will appreciate it.

Let me once again apprise you, the readership, that we, the Board, have differing "takes" on certain Scriptures relating to Biblical/eschatological interpretation. In these several *SR*'s that you will be receiving, we make no apology in presenting some of these "differences" in this series of messages. All of us on the Board hold to the inspiration of the Bible, to the deity of Jesus Christ, and a recognition of the need of the Lord's shed blood to forgive us

of our sins. Under this umbrella, we choose to fellowship and to share some of our convictions regardless of whether we are in total or partial agreement. We hope that you, our readership, will become "Bereans" and "receive the Word with all readiness of mind, and search the Scriptures daily (to determine) whether those things are so."

It is now in excess of two years since any further papers have been published as a result of the several presentations given at the November, 2006, Conference. However, with this issue of *SR* we are now very happy to provide you with two more conference "titles." We have not forgotten and, with your patience, we will complete this task as time and as writers' schedules permit us.

Although the titles of the two articles which follow are indeed similar, the textural/qualitative content of them differs considerably, for, in reality, fellow Bereans, the subject of FULLNESS, in and by itself, is very large and expansive. Regardless of the avenue you wish to follow to examine or study it, there is always a wealth of information to be gained or uncovered by those who seek it. Now, having said this, please enjoy how Forrest Cottrell and Doug Falk have "mined" this area of Biblical thought.

A Study of the Word Pleroma
and Its impact on the Believer Today

by
Forrest Cottrell

Col 1:18-22 (AV) states –

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 (Pleroma) dwell. And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight.

Further,

Eph 1:22-23 (AV) –

And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness (G - Pleroma) of Him that filleth all in all.

Strong 's Concordance defines the Greek word Pleroma as:

1. Complete
2. Filled as a container

3. To fill up
4. Fullness
5. Fulfilling

My question to you is: What needs to be filled up? The following are examples:

- My gas tank needs to be refilled regularly. It never stays full!
- My coffee cup needs to be refilled.
- My wallet needs to be refilled. It never remains full!

Then there is *pleroo*, the verb form of “filled up.” From *Strong 's Concordance*, its meaning includes:

1. The filling process
2. To fulfill
3. To supply
4. To complete or finish

We will see those words used and translated differently. Sometimes the word is "filled up." Sometimes it is the Greek word *telios* which means "it is finished" or "completed." It is often used as: *I finish a race, I finish my meal, I cross the finish line.*

As you think about those definitions, let me ask the question, "What needs to be finished or filled up?" A void is no doubt implied and, perhaps, by definition, needs to be filled. What is the “void”? Is the void the Universe? As you think about that question which was asked earlier about the dispensation of the Mystery (or Paul’s stewardship), as is meant from the Greek translation and what needs to be filled, what needed to be filled in the different dispensations? Christ filled something! What was it?

Psalms 24:1 states:

The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof;

The world, and they that dwell therein.

God created a *full* world. We know this because in Genesis 1 it says the “*world became void,*” so it was *full*, then became *empty*. He (Christ) has filled it up with sufficiency! Why is it we see it somewhat empty or partially filled? If you take a glass and start to fill it with water, when is it finished or full? Picture in your mind that you are filling that glass yourself. You keep filling and filling. What happens after a while? The water in the glass runs over. What is the “run over” called? A spill? A waste? Excess? It is wasted water. Relating this concept to belief systems, guess what religion is? It is my opinion that religion will try to add something to the already sufficiency of Christ’s completed work. Succinctly, religion tells us we must do certain rituals to be accepted by God when, in reality, Christ did all that was necessary for us to have access to the Father. We are obviously not filled by our works either.

The Hebrew word is the same as the Greek equivalent for *Pleroma* (meaning fullness). Interestingly, it is repeated three times, *melo, melo, melo*. It is by repetition that we learn; it is by repetition that the Holy Spirit teaches.

Colossians 1:18-22 states:

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 preeminence (the first position). For it pleased the Father that all Fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself.

Question: ***reconcile*** what? And to Whom? If there are two kids on the playground fighting, and I step between them to help them make up, I am ***reconciling*** one to the other.

Who is the “other” here being reconciled? The answer

is found in **Colossians 1:20-22**:

And having made peace through the blood of the cross by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works (hence, you are one of the two who needed to be reconciled), yet now that He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight.

So not only are we reconciled, and therefore, there is peace, but in the process we become *unblameable* and *unreprouvable*. And why is this necessary? Note **Heb 9:6-15**:

Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:

Remember! Israel had a succession of priests. They were the *mediators* between God and man! They were the "*go-betweens*." The priests always went into the tabernacle to accomplish the service of God. So this is why reconciliation needs to come in.

Heb 9:8-15 continued:

The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the Holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing. Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as

pertaining to the conscience;

In order for this reconciliation process to be mediated by the priests, there needed to be gifts and sacrifices that could not make him that did the service perfect. Even though he did those gifts and sacrifices, he was not perfected; he was not finished. The High Priest was still not complete as pertaining to the conscience.

Hebrews 9:10:

Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

Paul is basically saying to the high priest that everything that he is doing is empty. It is empty because it is not making him perfect, and performing a series of rituals with meats and drinks is not necessary. It has to do with satisfaction, and we are the “*I can't get no satisfaction*” generation (quoting Mick Jager of the Rolling Stones).

Do you have an idea where Paul is headed with the diverse washings and carnal ordinances? He is talking about the flesh; he is talking about *man made*! These ordinances were imposed until the time of reformation, yet many are still practiced today.

Consider **Hebrews 9:11:**

But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, Who

through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Remember, that is what the High Priest couldn't *do!!*)

Further, in verse **15 of Hebrews 9**:

And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament, (if you will, He is the "go-between" of the new testament) that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

So, the High Priest was the mediator in the dispensation of the Jew. In **I Timothy 2:5** (different dispensation or "stewardship"), we have Paul's writing to his adopted son:

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

The Greek dictionary in *Strong's Concordance* lists:

G3316- mesites-From G3319; a go between, that is, (simply) an *internunciator*, or (by implication) a *reconciler (intercessor)*: — **mediator**.

So, what did the Lord do? He **filled** up the role, or the void of High Priest. The void of a mediator, the void of reconciliation, the void of lots of meat and drink offerings and all the other carnal ordinances. He filled it up **ONE TIME!!!** A question is in order: Why do some churches go through certain practices or ordinances every Sunday? Do they really think that Christ's sacrifice, His offering, was **"insufficient"**?

As we continue in **Heb 10:9-10**:

Then said He, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

ONCE FOR ALL!!! One time satisfied it all. You, on the other hand, can't do it! It's impossible! But Christ did, once for all.

Verse 12 of Hebrews 10:

But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

An image comes to mind of a great athlete who comes forward and has three tries at the shot put, but you make only one throw and then say, "That's it. I've won this competition; it's over. I've finished, it's complete.

"Everybody else can sit down because your trial isn't sufficient. It won't measure up. I've done it all."

Verse 21:

And having a High Priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;)

Again, evil conscience raises its ugly head! Even though I

know what is true, I know I don't always do what I should be doing. ***“Hold fast the profession of our faith,”*** the Scriptures cry out, But what is profession of faith? Simply put, it is our labors. It is what we do. It is our lives, and, hesitatingly, it is what other people see.

Does your life reflect that Christ is all in all, that He has done it all? There is nothing left for us to do, because anything else beyond His sufficiency is waste. It falls vainly or wastefully onto the floor no different than the overflowing water from the cup filled.

Let us examine **Colossians 2:6-23**:

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

This is an important point by the way. With thanksgiving you want to show people that you are filled-up and abound with thanksgiving. Be thankful in every thing. Do you want to know the secret of happiness?

Paul tells us to **BE THANKFUL!** No expectations; just be thankful!

Verse 8 of Colosions 6:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Beware! This is a warning! Be awake and watchful, for there is an enemy.

What is vain deceit? Simply put, it is ego. It is vanity. When it is about Christ, then that is when it is truth, and that is

when it is right.

Verse 9:

For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Within this context, do we see the word or title "king" in this statement? "King" would have been a different dispensation. He was King of Kings to the Jews. He is not my King. He is my "Head" and I am a member of His body. I may be a small member. I may be the most insignificant, but I am a member of "the Body," and I serve a purpose. I do not know what that purpose is yet, or how my insignificance can be used by Him, but I am confident that somewhere in His overall purpose I have a part.

Verse 10-11:

And ye are complete in Him, (pleroo) Which is the Head of all principality and power: In Whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

Please note: it is by Christ, and, in addition, it is with Christ.

Verse 12:

Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God Who hath raised Him from the dead.

Buried in baptism? Was Christ placed in a tomb that had running water or was there a little puddle to be immersed in? Different religions say we were to be sprinkled with baptism water. Someone told me we were to be immersed in water, not just sprinkled, to be baptized. In the Old Testament, there was a washing or baptism with blood to **cover** sin, not take sins away.

The question arises, in which baptism are we supposed to be a participant?

Col. 3-14:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.

When did this fulfillment happen? Right there! However, when was it revealed? And to whom was it revealed? The Jews would have rejected this. In fact, they are the ones that said, "Crucify Him."

Col. 2:15-23:

And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from Which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines

of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

So let's review and look at what He (Christ) has done in **Col. 2:11-12:**

"...circumcised with a circumcision made without hands."

We were quickened, or made alive, with Him, which blotted out all of the handwriting of ordinances and all of the traditions of men...all those carnal ordinances talked about in the book of Hebrews. In Him, we have triumphed over all principalities and powers. Do you know how incredible that is? Triumphed! How many have ever triumphed? How many of you have been champion at something? Sports, singing, preaching? Triumphant — it is victory. It is Nike, the Greek goddess of victory. It's what the Olympic athletes aspired to do. They were rewarded with a wreath symbolizing their triumph.

What in your life symbolizes your triumph over the world? Or are you just part of the world? Now I'm not making a value statement, I'm not condescending. I'm just asking questions. The same question I must ask myself. Just because I may know what is right doesn't mean that I will choose to do what is right. That is why I may "feel" as if I am not "complete" yet, unless I am "in Christ." That is why others "feel" they need to add something to what Christ has already completed. But that is why I know that the fullness of the dispensation of time is not completed. However, there are many things that Christ has, in fact, completed for us.

As we continue to review **Colossians 2:16-19:**

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or drink, or respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or

of the sabbath days: Which are the shadow of things to come (not yet happened), but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you...

There's that warning again. Beguile – deceive; don't let them beguile you of your reward. Now when do we get a reward? When we do something good, like when we triumph. Christ has already triumphed over death and principalities and powers. We're not going to get credit for that. But because we are part of the Body of Christ, because He completes us in Him, we are completed, and we complete the Church, and are therefore fitly frame together in that completeness. It is all interconnected! The reward that we have is to be part of His victory and triumph.

Continuing in Col 2:18-19:

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility in worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by a fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from Which all the Body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

This is huge! He is our Head. He is not our King, as we discussed before. We are parts, joints, and bands, and we are all knit together in what is part of the "fullness" - the fullness of the Church. But, how did it get emptied? Wasn't it created perfectly? What happened? How did it get emptied out? Who caused the leak? Where did it all go? (These are all rhetorical questions, but something to think about.)

Colossians 2:20 –

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances? (Touch

not, taste not, handle not). (It's all the carnal "stuff" again. It's all the fleshly feeling stuff again.) ... *Which are all to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men.* (They are going to go away!) *Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.*

This is why people participate in ordinances, etc. **It's to the satisfying of the flesh**, and the *Pleroma* that we are talking about here is not the satisfying of the flesh, it is not a **physical filling** up of water or something other than the things of Christ Himself. When the flesh becomes involved, we have a desire and talent for satisfying the flesh. Everything we do in one way or another is typically to satisfy us. That's why we will never be filled. I was taught at a young age that I had to do things to make up for the things I did wrong, and that is just what religion is all about.

Just lay an old fashioned guilt trip on people. Then maybe they can ask us to do "something," typically our "tithe," and if they make us feel guilty enough, we might just dig deeper into our wallets. I don't remember the Apostle Paul asking for money to bribe the guards or money to pay for his luxury travel accommodations.

Moving on to **Ephesians 1:10-14:**

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him:

If you reviewed the Old Testament, did the Jews know what Paul is referring to in this context? Did the Jews at any time think anything about any gathering together? It was them, and only them, against the nations. There was no gathering together, and there was certainly no heavenly calling. Their promise was an earthly Kingdom.

Verse 11-12:

In Whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will: That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ.

Let me amend the end of this verse: "... who first trusted in Christ, as **our Head**" (see **Eph. 1:22**). These are not just my words, as I think I heard them from Oscar Baker. You see, if you are part of the Jewish belief, or you are "grafted in," then you are still part of the Jewish belief, and He's still your King as He was "King of the Jews." But if we are a new creation, then we are a member of the new creation with Him as our Head. He's not my King, He is my Head!

Moving on to **Ephesians 1:13-14:**

Whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in Whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.

Now when did this take place? When you believed!

Eph 1:22-23:

And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, Which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

I repeat -- When we trusted in Christ as our Head. When you see that difference, you obtain a different inheritance than what was offered to the Jews. They had the Kingdom on earth.

What do we have as an inheritance? Where is our Hope?

Eph 3:17-20:

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Are you as confused as I about the four dimensions mentioned? Did Paul repeat one dimension in there? There is length and width, which gives two dimensions, and that is called a plane. For example, a pane of glass. But this object has a thickness element to it or the "height." If I pour water onto it, how do I fill it? I can't, right? If I'm filling up your glass, I'm pouring water "in" your glass versus "on" your glass. Therefore, Paul says there is a fourth dimension, so you have length, width, height and depth. This, no doubt, is really hard to wrap our minds around. But only when you look at this from four dimensions can you understand...

...the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge that ye might be filled with the fulness of God.

Verse 20:

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us...

That power is *dunamis* power. Do you realize what *dunamis* power is? It is the Greek word from which is derived the word "dynamite." It is explosive!

An illustration to help explain this word is in order. I spent a weekend in Chicago with my son's college football team. He re-

requested that I speak to the team because, at a game earlier in the year, which incidentally they won, I spoke to the team prior to their taking the field. At that occasion I also spoke about *dunamis* power. And, for the record, the Trinity University team has the explosiveness of Christ to draw upon when they are pitted against any team (you can tell they were grasping for straws when they brought me in to do some kind of “trriage,” but they had *dunamis* power available to them).

On that day and in that game, they drew upon it, and they triumphed. Now, is it because of something they know? No. They are Bible students; they knew about *dunamis* power. Was it because of the way they felt? No, because that would have lasted through only the first quarter. But on the field, when someone wrapped them in the teeth, they wouldn't have felt very powerful. In the second half of the game a young man broke two tackles on the way to the end zone. He felt *dunamis* power. He felt the “**dynamite**” explosive power when he saw the first opponent coming at him. He said, "That's not enough! You don't have it, I'm going through you like a hot knife through butter." And he did!

With amazing speed he went to the end zone. On the following day the coach played the films over and over. And as he viewed those films he asked, "Where did that come from?" The ball carrier answered that it came from the *dunamis* power Coach Cottrell had talked about. He demonstrated what he believed! He had something else reserved to draw from, and Trinity won that game. It was close, but they won that game. Not me. It wasn't what I said, because they already knew what I said because I had said it before. What I had to do is to get them to think about it and **believe it**, and then to show it on the field. It is all about what Christ worked in them. The power that works in us.

Do you demonstrate the power that works in you every day?

Ephesians 4:11-13:

And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets;

and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Thus the perfecting, the finishing, the completing includes the building up of the body, not the tearing down; not the things that separate us and cause us to be diverse, but the things that unite us, bring us together, and what is that? Christ! How do you measure the fullness of Christ? It is not going to be done with a container, and I am not a vessel that can handle His fullness.

Verse 14-16:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, Which is the Head, even Christ: From Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Going to Strong's Concordance again:

(G4883-sunarmologe6-From G4862 and a derivative of a compound of G719 and G3004 (in its original sense of *laying*); to render **close jointed together**, that is, *organize compactly: be fitly framed [joined] together*).

We have been given the truth! Do you believe it? Or are we:

...children tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Paul goes on in Ephesians to say, ***G*row up into Him."** He is talking about children maturing in the Word based upon what they know to be true. He then adds to beware of:

...the sleight of men in cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Why is it every time Paul gives us something inspiring, he comes right back and says, "beware." Beware because there are vain philosophers. Beware because there are deceivers, sleight-of-hand cunning men. Do you think Satan is an ugly, grotesque, being who looks like he came out of a horror film? He doesn't look like that. He is an attractive, shining creature. The world looks to the pleasing of the eye, and Satan knows our weaknesses. That's how he "deceived" Adam and Eve -- the fruit looked pleasing (Gen. 3:6).

Let's look at that verse again in **Ephesians 4:15-16:**

...speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, Which is the Head, even Christ: from Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Consider what Paul is thinking about. He is talking about "complementing." This body, if we are all members of it, has to complement. We have to work together. We have to fit together. Even I, with my limitations, still have a God-given place in His order. And I am mandated to work together with you for the **unity** for it to increase. And what does it increase in? Love, charity, brotherly kindness. However you want to describe it, it goes without saying that I/we should have output with every input. That

is what people see, and that is what people measure. I might be a small input, but I am still a part, and I have a function. My body is a vessel, a container.

This “body” has all kinds of parts — they all fit together. And if they didn't, it and I wouldn't be full. That's the point Paul is making. "Fitly joined together" is a great Greek word — to render closely joined together, or fitly joined together. Have you ever seen tongue and groove flooring? This picture shows how we are just all "tongue and grooved" together, and, therefore, fitly joined together to be complete.

No more children...

...the verse continues. So we have to grow up! Are we making an increase in the body here? Is this all there is supposed to be? Are we all the parts? Are there more parts out there? Who in our lives can we touch with this truth that might help the body grow?

...unto the edifying of itself in love.

Lack of love for everyone shows we are not filled up. So now given the knowledge that I have shared with you intellectually, are you more complete? Maybe feelings have emotionally grabbed you which say, "I'm not quite filled yet, and I need to do something different." Do you believe that you are "**Complete in Christ**"? That is where it starts. Are you filled up? Are you still trying to add to what Christ has already done? If so, then you are saying that Christ was **insufficient** for you and **YOU** are greater because it takes your effort. That **effort** we contribute is waste!

We are full!! We have been filled!! Believe it!! This is where it starts, and then we demonstrate it by showing this fullness in our lives. Showing others the life that is within us, the hope that is within. Instead of strife, let's focus on what we agree upon and show others the **Love of Christ!** So, in **summary**, there are at least 32 things that Christ did to “fill up” the believer.

32 THINGS CHRIST DID TO FILL UP THE BELIEVER

1. Peace through the blood of His cross,
2. By Him to reconcile all things,
3. Present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight,
4. Having obtained eternal redemption for *us*,
5. Purge your conscience,
6. He is the Mediator,
7. And ye are complete in Him,
8. Circumcised with the circumcision made without hands,
9. Buried with Him in baptism,
10. Quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,
11. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances,.
12. Having spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them
13. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:
14. Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (touch not; taste not; handle not); after the commandments and doctrines of men?
15. Gather together in one all things in Christ,
16. Obtained an inheritance,
17. First trusted in Christ (as our Head).
18. Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,
19. And hath put all *things* under His feet,
20. Gave Him *to be* the Head over all *things* to the church,
21. To know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge,
22. Unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

32 THINGS CHRIST DID TO FILL UP THE BELIEVER
(continued)

23. And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints.
24. For the edifying of the body of Christ.
25. Come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
26. Unto a perfect man,
27. No more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,
28. May grow up into Him in all things,
29. The whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies,
30. The effectual working in the measure of every part,
31. Makes increase of the body
32. Unto the edifying of itself in love.

PLEROMA FOR TODAY

by

Douglas H. Falk

INTRODUCTION

How do we look upon life's shortcomings? Do we see another's shortcomings as an opportunity to embarrass them? Or, perhaps, as an opportunity to remind them of their faults, as if they may not recognize them or they may (heaven forbid) have forgotten them? Do we secretly rejoice in pointing out the shortcomings of others? By pointing them out, do we see them as an opportunity to "get back"? Can we hardly wait to tell others of another's shortcomings, and, in particular, the shortcomings of those closest to us? Do we really think that by pointing out the shortcomings of another we somehow make ourselves out to be better than they (as if in not having THAT particular shortcoming we have less shortcomings of our own)?*

On the personal side, how do we look at our own shortcomings? Do they depress us? Do they make us feel hopeless? Do they make us feel as if anyone could have done a better job? Do they make us hesitant to try? Are we stuck between the proverbial "rock and a hard place" in that if we try, we are bound to come up short in some way, and, if we don't try at all, we will certainly come up short simply by not trying?

*Note: For the purpose of this paper we will use the terms "shortcoming" and "lack" as an unintentional, perhaps uncontrollable, negative effect of an honest effort.

Is it a universal and (in most cases) accepted truth that all of us come up short in some way, but that we differ only in the specifics of our shortcomings?

Let us stop for a moment and determine, as a point of Biblical definition, the literal meaning of "sin," for this will give us a point of reference as we consider *Pleroma For Today*. By using a good Lexicon, we find that the best, unencumbered and, to the point, definition of sin is to:

Miss the mark, to, in effect, come up short, i.e., to have a lack, to miss the mark of our endeavors.

Following up on this, there is the implication that to "miss the mark" one must attempt to "hit the mark." If one does not attempt (try), then logically one cannot not come up short (unless not trying is a fault in itself). In my own experience as a school teacher, I would award "trying points" to be granted by me while the students were in the process of learning a new concept. These points would be rewarded regardless of how successful the students were in obtaining the "correct answer." Of course "trying points" were not awarded during a formal test. At that point the students must display comprehension of the material and not come up short; earnestly trying would not be enough.

When in attendance of an "organized" church, though the topic of sin often is discussed, either directly or by implication, its ramifications/specifics are never really delineated to those who occupy the pews (one must also wonder if it is elusive as well to those who do not occupy the pews). Sin is treated as something vague/obscure/ambiguous; even, in fact, in a manner that is most effective in keeping us bound to the concept (fear) of sin itself and thereby bound to the "organized" church. This, in essence, is "reverse psychology"

and occurs by treating it (sin) as something "everybody knows," something right under our noses, so to speak, but yet is never concisely defined.

It is this non-recognition and unspokenness of sin that (consciously or unconsciously) no doubt gives the greatest power to sin itself and thereby gives power and/or force (consciously or unconsciously) to the "organized" church, for he/she cannot address, fight, or conquer that which he/she does not recognize. When there is no clarification, there is fear, uncertainty and doubt. To be forever "in the dark" in the matter of sin is to be forever personally defeated, which then leads to being organizationally-solution dependent rather than God-solution dependent.

In addition to looking at *Pleroma* as it relates to us *for today*, this paper will look at sin with a focus specifically on its root meaning, i.e., "coming short" or "lack." Though there are drastic implications and angles to sin, it is the purpose of this paper to examine sin from the perspective of its root meaning, yet without in any way diminishing the seriousness of sin. So, what does sin have to do with "*Pleroma*" and, more specifically, "*for today*"?

The essence of the word "Pleroma" is "to fill," "to complete." To fill or complete, there must (a priori) be emptiness or at least a lack, a shortcoming. Since the meaning of sin is to miss the mark, to come up short, to lack, "Pleroma" and sin can be seen as being inverses or complements (negative) of each other. Succinctly, "Pleroma" completes that which sin failed to complete. It is strongly suggested that no other word or "salvation synonym" in Scripture directly answers to sin. We will be examining how this truth, related to "fulness," is not only quite in our favor but vastly unknown and even contradicted in much of Christendom.

Some Background Information

In a former publication, *Scripture Research* (SR, V4, N7), the article entitled "What is Pleroma?," forms the foundation for this study. Though the time element, "Today," is used in the title, please do not limit its extensiveness; for it has implications beyond today and the day after, etc., as well as a shorter time-frame than "a day" -- down even to a moment-by-moment Pleroma.

From SR, V4, N7, we found that *Pleroma* primarily signifies "that which fills" or, in some contexts, "that which is filled." It is used of the filling agent as well as the object that is filled or completed. It is important to realize that the focus is not the agent of filling or that which is filled, but rather that which was previously lacking or has a shortcoming is now completed and/or filled full. Simply put, a state of completeness/wholeness now exists in contrast to a previous state of incompleteness/deficiency.

Fit and Filling

Let me further add, to simply "complete" that which is lacking does not necessarily imply a condition of *Pleroma*. The concept of fullness is more than just filling. Strictly speaking, for fullness to occur, that "stuff" which does the filling must FIT the circumstance/need. To fill a water container with something other than water, say dirt, for example, would not meet the conditions of fullness. Yes, the container would be full (of dirt) but yet would not be in a state of fullness (*Pleroma*). Not only must a state of completeness exist, but the state of completeness must be of such a nature that the container and the filling agent are meant for each other, i.e., complement each other (see SR, V4, N7).

Let me expand upon this idea. Seeking a filling agent that "fits" adds an entirely new perspective to what *Pleroma* signifies. With this, our focus now changes from "one of two"

options, i.e., one, that which is filled or, two, that which fills, to the one option of seeing the two as one. Thus a new concept arises and includes a filling and a complement to complete or fulfill the "system," so to speak. Realizing this, the focus is on how the two work together or are synergistic or cooperative, rather than opposing or competing with each other. As an example, this same thought is exemplified with the institution of marriage, when the two come together, resulting in becoming "one," or how separate "heads" and "tails" blend into a single coin as documented extensively in SR, V4, N7.

Things that Accompany Salvation

The "*What is Pleroma?*" (SR, V4, N7) study was based on the Col. 2:9 text and deals with the "vertical" nature of our existence, the philosophical and infinite. *Pleroma for Today* is centered on the Col. 2:10 verse and deals with the "horizontal" nature of our existence, i.e., it speaks to the psychological and finite. The vertical aspects found in Col. 2:9 are expressive of the relational aspects between Christ and God, and defines and differentiates what *pleroma* means from an eternal perspective. The horizontal aspects found in Col 2:10, on the other hand, refer to our relationships with others and within ourselves, and define and differentiate what *pleroma* is from a "today" perspective.

Our completeness (*pleroma*) in Christ is typically and usually seen with respect, and limited to, our salvation and our redemption. Our salvation is based on what Christ has done on our behalf and assumes that the sin issue is/has been dealt with absolutely. Though this truth is sure and definite, there is, however, an application component resident in this truth that is seen in the truth and application of Col. 2:10 that will now be the center of our attention. This hopefully will grant us insights related to what completion (*pleroma*) means to us today, in effect, to those truths that are ours "after our salvation," i.e., apart from salvation itself.

Gnosticism and Pleroma

When the Apostle Paul used the word *pleroma*, he was specifically addressing the Gnostic belief system of his day. What did the notion of completeness (*pleroma*) within the Gnostic belief system imply? From *What is Pleroma?* (SR, V4, N7), the primary point of the Gnostic system was the perception of the infinite reaching to the finite in multiple hierarchical (specifically 31) angelic steps. In the mind of their day, these 31 angelic steps formed the *Pleroma* (completeness) between themselves and God. Such a Pleroma, however, was quite contrary to what was revealed to Paul.

For us today, it is too easy to disassociate and dismiss ourselves from the teachings of the people of earlier times, to treat them as an interesting but yet as an historical anomaly, and, yes, even quite distant from our own experience. But let us examine this “Gnostic doctrine” system to determine if there are analogies between it and the beliefs and practices of today.

By their very definition, hierarchical systems (as used in the Gnostic Doctrine) sustain themselves by having fewer positions at “the top” and more positions “at the bottom.” Inherent in any hierarchical system is the resultant effect of exclusiveness. For what real benefit is there to be included unless others are excluded? In practice, such exclusiveness is encouraged, expected, and, in most cases, never to be questioned. Though the few at the top would have the many at the bottom believe that their own sustainability is dependent on those at the top, the opposite is as or even more so true. The very sustainability of the few at the top is dependent on the many at the bottom. For what happens (in terms of not being politically correct) to the “Chiefs” at the top when there are too few “Braves” below?

Let us begin this matter by observing how, within certain organizations and, unfortunately, even in churches of

today, “exclusiveness” and “systems of hierarchy” are not uncommon, and, in fact, are the norm. Such exclusiveness is expected, encouraged, and certainly never to be questioned. However, as believers, beware of falling into such “innocent” traps. For whether we talk esoterically about 31 angelic steps or speak of today’s religious rank and legalism, the reality of the matter states: In essence there really is no difference between the hierarchical organizations reflected in the churches of today and the angelic steps of the Gnostics of Paul’s day.

In the eyes of God, the ground at the foot of the cross is level. Today it is common to assign a rank or an office to someone which allegedly elevates them to a position above others and therefore, in essence, closer to God. Such a position often includes the characterization of them as being “A man of God,” which, in itself, provokes a sense of spiritual authority or superiority (the implication, of course, being that those “below” him are not “Men of God”). To grant such a position to another (no matter how slight, no matter how seemingly insignificant) is to ultimately grant to them a portion of the *pleroma*. In assigning a position of this nature to someone, we not only elevate them beyond what is proper, we even increase the error, as we must of necessity correspondingly also subtract from what Christ is to us, as we are in essence granting to them at least a portion of the *Pleroma*. This error becomes *no different* than the Gnostics of Paul’s day. When another “step” is inserted between God and ourselves, we are admitting that the *Pleroma* we share in Christ must in some way be supplemented; further, when doing this we are in effect not giving Him His rightful place. This is the essence of what Paul is denouncing here in Colossians, for he is emphatic in his announcement: The *pleroma* between us and God resides solely and completely within Christ Himself!

Let Bishop Lightfoot* speak to this issue:

In contrast to the Gnostic doctrine, Paul asserts and repeats the assertion that the PLEROMA abides ABSOLUTELY and WHOLLY in Christ. Speculations on the nature of intermediate spiritual agencies -- their names, their ranks, their offices -- were abundant in the schools of Judeo-Gnostic thought. Without entering into these speculations, Paul asserts that Christ is Lord of all, the highest and the lowest, whatever rank they may hold and by whatever name they are called: Col 1:16. The MOTIVE of Gnostic angelolatry is not difficult to imagine. There was a SHOW of humility, for there was a confession of weakness, in this subservience to inferior editorial agencies. It was held feasible to grasp AT THE LOWER LINKS of the chain which was far beyond the reach of man. The successive grades of intermediate beings were as successive steps, by which man might mount the ladder leading up to the throne of God. This carefully woven web of sophistry the Apostle tears to shreds. It follows from the true conception of bound earth to Heaven, when Heaven SEEMED Christ's Person, that He and He alone can bridge over the chasm between earth and heaven -- for He is at once the lowest and the highest. He raises man to God, for He brings down God to man. Thus the chain is reduced to a SINGLE link, this link being the "Word made flesh." As the PLEROMA resides in Him, so is it communicated to us through Him. To substitute allegiance to ANY OTHER spiritual mediator is to SEVER the connection of the limbs with

*Lightfoot, J. B., *The Epistles of St. Paul, Colossians and Philemon*, 1904, Macmillan Co., New York, NY.

the Head, which is the center of life and the mainspring for all energy throughout the body.

In short, thinking on this matter, anything beyond a single link between the infinite God and finite man is a step away from the single link that is provided for us in the Person of Christ Jesus. That, in fact, indeed HE is the Pleroma. We are complete in Him, and in Him only. Though Christendom would say “in theory” this is true, but in reality or actuality, it is *not really* taken to heart or practiced. Concomitantly, the concept of being complete in Christ is understandably never addressed or defined. To be complete in Christ only and to speak of Christ as being the only step (Pleroma) between us and God are mutually inclusive, i.e., they imply each other and are conceptually the same.

Honestly, for various reasons, such a bold or “daring” thought of the “single link” between the infinite and finite is not something that we are probably even comfortable thinking about, especially as we ponder the implications. Seemingly, mankind finds the need to have something “more tangible” than there being a mere single “ambiguous” link from us to God. In this way, the completeness that is spoken of in Col. 2:9 gets “watered down” and diluted. We then find ourselves, in effect, no longer “complete in Christ,” but are now effectively and probably unintentionally complete in those other substitutes found in associations or fellowships with legalism(s) and rituals. Having Christ alone is simply not enough. We must (or think we must) also add (i.e., add to the *Pleroma* we share in Christ) “a little something” to our worship of God. Perhaps this might be someone, something, or someplace; but regardless of what that “something” is, in effect, we are demonstrating the fact that we know not of the “*Pleroma for Today*.”

Note how these thoughts run parallel with the notion of salvation by Grace (*Scripture Research*, V4, N2). In that

article (*What is Grace?*) it was determined that there is a/the temptation to add "a little something" else to/for our own salvation. This thought may lead us to believe that in some way we, vainly, unilaterally, may contribute something from within ourselves that gives us an "edge" over others, something that we contribute to our personal salvation.

Expanding on the thoughts found in the former paragraph, to find such a "little something," either in ourselves that we contribute actively, or lacking in ourselves that we contribute passively to our personal salvation, is to destroy the very foundation of Grace. This positive (what we have) or negative (what we don't have) action turns salvation by Grace into salvation by works, by "my little contribution" to the salvation process or by another's lack of a contribution to the salvation process. The fact that in such thinking we contribute only a "little something," rather than a "big something," still makes it no less a "thing," Perhaps even by "our contribution" being small in nature may make it that much more repulsive and insulting to God, for in the end it still negates the message of salvation by Grace. Worse still is to proclaim salvation by Grace and then allow to "sneak in" or to invoke this "little something" alongside the gracious actions of our Saving God. As an example, when Moses struck the rock twice to obtain water, perhaps implying his action brought water from the stone, not by a/the gracious act of God.

Let us consider, for the sake of discussion, these "little somethings" and how they may impact on our life at the point of salvation as well as impact our life following our salvation. Thinking for a minute, if, in the case of our personal salvation, we add a "little something" to augment God in saving us, then quite predictably after salvation the tendency is/might be to subtract a "little something" from our position in Christ. In the former the tendency would be to say, "Yes, my salvation is by Christ alone, but let me contribute 'something' to His work." In the latter, the tendency would/might be to say, "Yes, I am complete in Christ Who is the *Pleroma*, but yet I

am lacking something in this or that area of my life." In the first case we are saying that Christ's work is insufficient to save us; in the second case we are saying we are not good enough to merit the effect of His salvation. In reality, from any perspective (in salvation itself or following salvation), Christ alone fills properly (*Pleroma*) what is lacking in every situation, and therefore He is "good enough" and we are "good enough" in/through Him.

Adamantly, neither of these two additional "little somethings" that we may think contribute to the salvation process or we rely on for our completeness (*Pleroma*) following salvation, is in agreement with "the salvation by Grace alone" teachings of Scripture. In life, these adding/subtracting tendencies, though not intended, creep in quite innocently. They result, however, by "unconsciously" invading our very thinking and perceptions of Grace and *Pleroma* without even the slightest notice or overt encouragement. Unfortunately, they stealthfully invade our thinking quite naturally and are no doubt latent in our humanness.

Unless we are actively and consciously avoiding such "little somethings" in our perceptions of our salvation or of our completeness in Christ, we can, with a high degree of probability, say that they have already crept into our thought processes. Such "little somethings" are certainly the most difficult to avoid because they come with, really, only the very best of intentions. Rationalizing for a moment, in our own fleshly defense, these "somethings" come "for our own good," they come to give substance and evidence to our "standing," i.e., they come with the best of intentions. Nonetheless, they add another layer or link between ourselves and God other than Christ Himself, and therefore equate to the very Gnostic thoughts Paul was seeking to eliminate/annihilate.

Stopping for a moment, there really is a world of difference between saying, "Complete in Christ," and saying, "Complete in Christ only." The former allows for "a little

something" that we may add to the "mix," even if it is slight. The latter statement explicitly stands on the merit of Christ alone! It excludes from the "equation" ourselves, either in salvation itself, or completeness. In math jargon, we would say that Christ is the necessary and sufficient condition in/of our salvation and our sustenance!

Let us examine further the meaning of the above two statements: 1) what being "complete in Christ only" implies, and 2) what the resultant, following salvation completeness implies, for resident in these two statements is found what we, today, at this very moment, have in Christ Jesus. Let us begin this examination by assuming, as a premise, that the Scriptures do speak to us in this matter of "completeness." Generally, when we look at the completeness-in-Christ issue, we, more than naught, relegate it to the sin issue and, unhesitatingly, that it does certainly, completely, and without reservation "fill and FIT" properly. Discussing this issue further, let us first ask the questions, What is sin, and how does it impact in this matter of *filling*? Secondly, are there other areas of our lives that are in need of a *fulfilling*, of a *completeness* perspective? These areas of inquiry are not commonly addressed under the "umbrella" of our completeness in Christ and are not generally perceived as a sin issue per sé.

When referencing sin, and when we ask the question, "Exactly how do we sin?," Christianity, as a whole, generally responds by stating that sin refers to the "dark or seamy things/side of life" (conveniently forgetting that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light) -- thereby indicating that drinking, extramarital sex, lying, cheating, drugs, pride, stealing, swearing, love of money, are how we sin. Really, when you think about it, the list is rather short. Sins within the Christian community can generally be counted on a few fingers.

Honestly, if we are to avoid those things just previously mentioned, would we not be pretty much covered as taught by the teachings found in most of Christendom today? Perhaps

also implied is that, if we lived a life unchecked by the direct influence of others, or some governing or accountability system, our lives would fall into “the abyss,” and, subsequently, we would find ourselves teetering on moral and ethical disaster. Is not all this “doctrine” fundamentally implied within church organizations? Also, by silent implication, if we have discontinued regular church attendance, we must (by default) be headed to a state of moral or ethical disaster, since by being, in effect, outside the organized church, we are in a state of incompleteness. All this is offhandedly implying that at least part of our completeness (Pleroma) lies within the church organization.

Traditional Christendom, with its inherent negative view of humanity, is untrusting. Under such a negative view, any inherent trust cannot be granted and the method of operation then becomes: “You can only expect what you inspect,” i.e., do not expect others to do more than what they know you will inspect (to which one may counter: “Where then is the respect?”). Such an untrusting approach demands continual scrutiny and substantiation of every claim. Under such conditions one is never trusted and in turn never trusts. However, if indeed this is an accurate depiction of human nature, Russ Schaeffer would then postulate: “What is there then in us that is worthy of salvation?” Worthy indeed even of the death of His Son.

Though Christendom is well versed in the evils portrayed in Romans, Chapter 1 (and of course their resultant condemnations), they seem to be quite less versed in Romans, Chapter 2, where Paul speaks of those that do by nature the things of God. In fact, even the possibility of doing the things of God by one’s nature is unquestionably contradictory to the typical view Christendom has of humanity (though certainly any such proper actions do not in the least negate the necessity of salvation of all through the Son).

We have this perception that “overt” evil is lurking everywhere, that if we lived unchecked, all of us would be monsters. It is not rare to believe that disobedience and corruption are everywhere. Much of this thinking comes from watching the nightly news or in glancing at the newspaper. For, of course, bad news travels fast, bad news gets our attention, bad news sells. When only the seamy side of humanity is our focus, a belief in the horrendous nature of us all is solidified. On a personal note, my father would watch the evening news and had a strong impression of how terrible it was outside. But, to all this, I challenge the readers to determine for themselves if lawlessness really is rampant.

It is my proposition that, outside of our doors, upon examination, you will find that most people are obeying the law. People stop at red lights, people stand in lines, people pay for what they take. People, generally, when driving their cars, let others “in” while in traffic. People often hold the door open for you. And, yes, people more often than naught, say, “Thank you.” Of course there are exceptions, but these are exceptions, not the rule. For the most part, people are not lawless, but do have a sense of right and wrong which governs what they do or don't do. Indeed, in speaking quite generally, the advice, “Let your conscience be your guide,” if followed, is a precursor to proper behavior. Let us not forget that the law was made for the lawless, not for the lawful (I Tim. 1:9).

Quoting William Archer:

The great, dominant, all controlling fact of this life is the innate bias of the human spirit, not towards evil, as the theologians tell us, but towards good. But for that bias, man would never have been man; he would only have been one more species of wild animal, ranging a savage, uncultivated globe, the reeking battleground of sheer instinct and appetite.

However, back to the matter of completeness. How interesting it is that we may have a misconception of what completeness, inadequacy, coming short, or missing the mark in our lives consists of. Here are a few examples to ponder: You are reminded (perhaps in a demeaning tone of voice) by your spouse or a friend, “Did you remember to get the milk for tonight?” Or, “Did you stop by the bank?” Or, “Did you remember to call...?” In all these there is an implication of a possible lack or shortcoming leveled at you.

Most certainly we all have a shortcoming or are lacking in something, and perhaps we are surrounded by people or a person who may have the “special” skill of making sure to remind us of our shortcomings. By these verbal innuendoes they want to constantly remind us of our inadequacies, no doubt preying/feeding on our paranoia and attacking our confidence and unsettling our lives. All such reminders are done, of course (in their mind), for our own good. (As a personal illustration, my dad would often say, “Don’t be so hard on yourself,” to either himself or me when we experienced some lack in our lives.) In everyday life, perhaps the best we can expect from one that is caring and fond of us is to have him/her point out our shortcomings (but only when necessary!), not in a defensive posture, but in a kind and constructive manner by saying such things to us as, “Let’s do this together,” or “Let’s start this all over.”

Unfortunately, it is all too common and easy for us to fall into the same trap as that of others by noting what is lacking in them. Another human trait is to not recognize the positive characteristics of our family, friends or acquaintances, as it is very easy to point out that which is lacking and which needs improvement in them. Succinctly, it does not take any great insight to find lack in ourselves or others, but it does take a greater discipline within ourselves to not point out such things. Try not pointing out the insufficiencies in others (either to them or to another) and see how hard it is to remain silent!

Contrast this fault-finding approach with a very powerful quote from Gothe:

**Treat a man as he is and you make him worse.
But treat a man as he could be, and you will
make him what he can be.**

This philosophy is completely contrary to how we typically look at others, and yet is it very true. If you see someone who is "lazy" and you treat them and refer to them in this way, it will only confirm their laziness, subsequently make them lazier, and effectively make them worse ("Since I am lazy, I might as well make the most of it."). Fundamentally we have the notion that to improve someone we need to point out their negatives (as though perchance they were not aware of them) and, by doing so, that will in some way inspire them to strive for excellence; however, it often produces essentially the opposite effect. Any resultant positive action from such negative treatment is done only to appease, is probably done under duress, and probably seen as a burden and weight rather than a motivating factor to lasting changed behavior. Corrected actions under negative treatment are generally temporary in duration, lasting only until the "enforcer" stops enforcing.

However, if we treat others and refer to them as better than they are, we inspire, encourage, and foster a greater self image, effectively making them better than they are! Such resulting positive action comes from within rather than from a burden imposed from without. In the world of experience, one approach is employed to emphasize the visible negative, while the other is employed to emphasize the invisible positive. The end result of these two areas of emphasis makes all the difference in the world!

Really, aren't these two philosophical approaches of dealing with "lack" often used by teachers, parents, or coaches with their children or students? Isn't the foundation of the

positive approach an inherent belief in someone and, with the application of encouragement and care, seeing that the recipient is inherently not all negative in him/her self, but, in fact, they have within them the ability and willingness to improve themselves? The positive treatment approach is in direct conflict with the traditional view Christendom has of humanity, and even doubly more so when it is recognized that positive treatment precedes any positive action, i.e., treating them as if they already were better.

Let us address some of the incomplete/complete issues in the area of “religious” belief systems. The real lure of the many cults is not their “truth,” per se, but that they make one feel immediately “accepted” (belonging/supported). Humans, as a general rule, will gravitate towards accepting groups. It is this state of acceptance (i.e., not lacking!) that speaks most to people, and not so much the teaching or cult itself. On the opposite side of the coin, the charge can be leveled against many main-stream Christian groups, as many times they have failed miserably to accept others (those lacking) into the “C church family” or fellowship. As a side note, it needs to be stated that perhaps the best defense against a loved one falling into such an “accepting” cult is to grant to them the acceptance that they yearn for, with such acceptance steaming from the acceptance we have in the Beloved.

Our conservative, Christian “doctrine” dictates that in man (saved or unsaved alike) lies no good and therefore we cannot trust ourselves or others. Succinctly, we CANNOT accept anyone unconditionally with no reservations. With this position we are caught between our convictions of our being no good in ourselves and, obviously, of others as being of no good, even though we as Christians have been “accepted in the Beloved.” What a conundrum! We as legalistic believers find that we must always hold on to something or hold something over others. As legalists, in our thinking, we cannot and are not free to honestly invoke unconditional and gracious acceptance and forgiveness of sin and sins by Christ. In fact,

to many in the conservative Christian camp, unconditional acceptance is fundamentally quite foreign. This is a very sad commentary! For us as conservative Christian Believers, we of all people should manifest this “gracious acceptance” attitude to those close and, yes, to those not so close to us. We should be paragons of Christian Grace and encouragement to a world that honestly knows all too little of such treatment.

No matter where one may travel, what teacher, guru, or “saint” one may listen to, they all share in common an appeal to our inherent sense of incompleteness, our sense of insufficiency. This may be masqueraded as “a return,” “enlightenment,” “a secret,” or perhaps that we simply need to rid ourselves of our mistaken sense of lack; unequivocally an inherent sense of incompleteness is being appealed to. Though widely varied methods of overcoming our incompleteness are proposed, they all share in the common goal of providing a (illusory) solution to humankind’s NOT being complete. All methods of achieving completeness (effectively Pleroma) start with the same basic premise -- that of human “lack” -- and all end with the same basic promise -- that the problem or lack will be somehow fixed/corrected, that you eventually, if you just follow the method (and pay me the money!), will find that elusive state of fulfillment/happiness, i.e., completeness.

Make no mistake, in Christendom there are as well many hucksters who sell solutions and so-called “spiritual salve” which they prescribe to susceptible takers to address this universal need of “insufficiency and/or lacking.” This sales phenomenon is rampant and resident in the minds and hearts of people. This enterprise or “business” (“Oprahism”?) is very profitable! Literally, billions and billions of dollars and an untold amount of power is exerted over the “unsuspecting” when these unscrupulous practices are employed. What an unfortunate scenario, especially considering that the price of our completeness has already been paid in Him.

Let it not be said that there is no truth in the world’s

various religious belief systems. Some truth must be in them to account for their being at least partially attractive, which, in turn, serves as a recruiting mechanism to the unsuspecting. It is the opinion of this author that, although they may contain some truth, they fail in revealing the basis or true method of achieving the truth presented. One example of this would be to state, “You will reach a state of peace by getting rid of your cares.” For sure this statement is true (for who can argue against it?), but by not revealing the true method of achieving this truth (“Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you.”), the method(s) prescribed eventually fail in achieving the desired goal. Another example within these diverse philosophical/esoteric/religious thought systems is that it is common to speak of a nebulous state of “divine nature” of man or mankind itself. Again, though there is truth in such a statement, when the basis (cause) of the truth is ignored, the truth remains open to conjecture and can be easily seen as only empty speculation. It is of significant interest to note here that the world as a whole is honestly desirous of the end results of the Pleroma, but it fails to grasp the true method (Christ) of achieving those results.

If the truths of Christ are understood and lived, our lives will reflect this. In a tribute to Dr. Charles Asbell, President of SR, he was questioned why he and his wife Marilyn are so happy all the time (note: in the Psalms, “happy” can be properly substituted for “blessed”). The question then led to an opportunity for Chuck to present the method used to achieve such a desired approach to life. This all happened without Chuck’s and Marilyn’s having a particular goal in mind; they simply were reflecting how they saw life. Such is the proper method of witnessing of the Pleroma we share in Christ. The result in our lives will be evident such that it likely will create a “draw” within others. Once others are desirous of achieving a similar end result in their own lives, they become open to knowing and then receiving the method (reason) of our happiness (i.e., Christ). To “push” the method before the goal is desired is to in

effect “get the cart before the horse,” and this understandably often leads sadly to the rejection of the method.

But getting back to those personal things that are present in our own lives and, subsequently, are manifested and given too much recognition by another party, many times they force us to focus more on the OPINION of others, wishing only to appear complete, i.e., making for good APPEARANCES only. By this I mean that we become engrossed with only appearing not to in some way be incomplete, rather than boldly facing our incompleteness and then boldly internalizing the one and only solution to our incompleteness -- the completeness (Pleroma) we share in Christ. To not recognize our lack and/or to not recognize His filling is to cause us to be, at our core, fretful, uneasy, and unbalanced, if you will. The inspirational writer Vernon Howard puts it in story form this way:

It is not a fall that bothers us so much as the knowledge that others have witnessed our fall. Then in our embarrassment we explain and justify and accuse, which reveals slavery to the opinions of others toward us. This proves that human beings are much more interested in presenting a good appearance than in correcting the cause of the fall. That is as ridiculous as placing a fancy carpet over a broken floor instead of making necessary repairs. No wonder we fall so often!

Consider the title of the book, "I'm OK, you're OK." Assuming for a moment that the premise of our position “in Christ” is true (is it not?), and also assuming we are looking at the title of this book from an eternal perspective, should not we be the ones, if any, to fully embrace the title of this book?

With this being said, we then are the ones who should be living out our position of acceptance, kept by Christ Him-

self. Having said this, do we still live and remain in a “Yes, but...” mode or attitude? Realistically, this amounts to saying we do not really believe/live it. If we find ourselves with a “Yes that is true, but...” attitude, may it be suggested that the reader reflect now on the implications of “I’m OK, you’re OK” as if it were indeed true. (Note: this would be the supreme application of the previously referenced Gothe quote, since being “OK” is true, but not necessarily evident.) The reader may find within his/her reflection a peace from strivings that is most welcome.

This problem, i.e., that we all have lost something or are lacking in something in our everyday affairs, can it be traced back to the events found in the book of Genesis, chapter 3? Let us take note that the immediate response of Adam and Eve upon being approached by God, after eating the forbidden fruit resulting in the fall, was their recognition of the fact that they were lacking!! They HIDDEN; they COVERED UP; they were LACKING!!! The implication is that they were missing something that they needed, something that was now incomplete. Bringing that thought forward to Col. 2:10, **COULD IT BE THAT THE TRUTHS IN THIS CONTEXT, WHICH ARE RELATED TO FULNESS OR FILLING, SOMEHOW SPEAK OF GOD’S ACTION(S) IN OFF-SETTING, RECTIFYING OR CORRECTING THIS NEED, LACK, OR INCOMPLETENESS THAT ENSUED OR RESULTED WHEN ADAM AND EVE SINNED AND THUS FELL, AND FOUND THEMSELVES IN A STATE OF ALIENATION FROM GOD?** Today, we, as believers, because of our relationship to God the Father, because of the Lord’s work on Calvary, are now found to be complete, not lacking, not needing to “cover up,” not needing to hide.

As a result of our being complete in Christ, why should this “lacking” now be found in us? The fact that others and, yes, ourselves, many times, are more than willing to remind us of what they/we may perceive in us are our short comings?

Yet, our challenge is to start to live as if we are complete in Christ, for indeed we are!

Does this completeness in Christ's position and the walk associated with it apply only to the "here and now"? Or does it have application to some future state or life? If it is for the "here and now," THIS is how we infuse it into our lives and walk in it. It should be part of our very thoughts. It should result in a continual reminder of the completeness we share in Christ, regardless of the specific outcomes of our efforts in life. I suggest that THIS constant reminder of what our Heavenly Father has accomplished for us in Christ is where we need and receive most of our help and comfort. This, in the daily and moment-by-moment results (lacking or not) of our efforts, is where His work is most needed and has the most meaningful impact. It goes without saying that, if Christ does not help us here, where we need it the most, He does not really help us at all. Succinctly, if we can take the completeness gift/mindset (belief) that we have in Christ and then purge our minds of those thoughts that in effect defeat or weaken us, we have applied this completeness gift in the most useful and pertinent manner. THEN the completeness (Pleroma) that we share in Christ will have a very real and substantial and beneficial effect on us.

Conclusion

From your own personal experiences, substitute your thoughts or remarks which relate to your own life situations of "lack" or "incompleteness." Perhaps in your thinking they are seemingly insignificant events! But if they are insignificant, why are they remembered??? Maybe some of these events consist of remarks, looks, or actions by someone that degrades and/or humiliates you. These situations may sink more deeply into your psyche than you realize. Often in life one strong negative remark may counter-balance any positive comment or anything else that is said and done on a given day. Let me unhesitatingly state that this paper is not saying or advocating

the denial that there may be lessons to be derived by recognizing our shortcomings as they, perhaps, are or may be instructive to us. Certainly some shortcomings need to be addressed and dealt with; these could be termed *relevant shortcomings* and *are for* us in that they direct and teach us how to improve our lives. In closing, the focus of this paper has been directed towards *irrelevant shortcomings* that are used or leveled against us, within our own "soul." Experience has taught us we cannot live perfect lives based upon the eyes of others or ourselves. Also, coming up short in some manner is an inherent result of any attempt we may try. As stated previously, the only way to avoid coming up short is to never attempt, and, by the same token, never attempting anything has its own shortcoming. Our only way out is to rest in the "Pleroma for Today!" Each day, each moment, each comment, each action, each thought, we should be in accordance with Him and His divine provision and in His completeness, as we are in Him complete (present tense). Let us in our day-to-day experiences, enjoy both the filling that not only fills, but also fills/fits properly, regardless of how small or large in size or quantity our shortcomings. By knowing and recognizing this we can all breathe just a little easier.

Final note.

This paper has presented quite a dim view of the “organized” church. Within the context of this paper, such a position is felt to be justified. Holding back on the Pleroma that we have in Christ is inexcusable and unwarranted and, in addition, the “organized” church pretends to convey a sense of incompleteness to those not meeting its own legalistic requirements, rules, and regulations. This, however, does not negate the positive contributions many churches make in people’s lives, such as being supportive of one another, being a source of positive friendships and fellowships, and being a source for solving family and relational issues. However, one must wonder if the perception and effectiveness of churches would improve greatly by more honestly presenting the Pleroma of Christ as it relates to “today.”