

# Sermon 16, The Importance of Being Begotten, Ephesians 1:23b

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**Proposition:** Jesus Christ is continuously and completely the recipient of His Father’s deity, and until you know that, you don’t know God’s power.

## Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, if you have a broken, messed-up family our text this morning is for you. If you have a wonderful family, this text is also for you. You see, this text is about the truth that God gave His own being to His Son. Theologians call this truth “the eternal generation of the Son.” It may seem arcane or distant from our daily lives, but it’s not! If you are a parent or have parents, this truth is for you. If you are a person who needs to love and be loved, this truth is for you. If you are a person with needs, this truth is for you. The truth that we are going to look at together this morning is that Jesus Christ is continuously and completely filled by His Father. In fact, we could go so far as to say that without the Father, Jesus is nothing. Without the Father, there would be and could be no Jesus! But of course, given the eternal reality and the infinite life of the Father, Jesus is everything that He is, and He is everything that He is for us. He can never cease to be fully, completely, and infinitely God over all, blessed forever, amen. And that truth is the best news you and I can ever hear. God is one of us. His mighty power is at work in His Son such that, in Christ, you have God as your Father. That is the most practical truth in the Bible. We will see it this morning under two headings — Christ, the man for others, and Christ, the God over all.

### **I. Christ, the God Over All, v. 23c**

The first thing I want you to see in this text is what it means.

### **A. The Divine Passive: “Continuously Filled”**

The church is the fullness of Christ, but Christ is continuously and completely filled!

Now, wait, you’re saying: that’s not what my translation says! No, it’s not. Here’s why. The word “fills” is actually passive in form. It reads “being filled.” But here’s the catch: the form in Greek can have an active meaning. That’s why virtually all English translations read “fills” instead of “being filled” in the final clause of v. 23. But the fact remains that Paul knows and uses the active form of this word in 4:10, and there he clearly says that Christ fills all things. But here, I think, he really did mean the verb to be passive. Now, what does it mean to be filled “all in all”? Probably it just means to be filled completely. Christ is being (present tense, so continuous action) completely filled. Now, who is the agent here? Well, the Bible is fond of this form we call the “divine passive.” That doesn’t mean that the passive voice is divine and that it should be used as often as possible. Rather, it means that a passive with no agent specified is generally to be ascribed to God Himself. When I say “Christ is being continuously and completely filled,” you know that I mean “God is filling Christ continuously and completely.” Based on the parallel passage in Colossians, we know that the fullness here is the fullness of deity. God is filling Christ continuously and completely with the fullness of deity! In short, brothers and sisters, this is a statement of the eternal generation of the Son. We know that the Son of God is eternally begotten, begotten of His Father before all worlds. It is that eternal generation which is referenced in Psalm 2, when the Father says, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” As best as we can tell, eternity is a perpetual “now.” Precisely because the Son is eternally begotten of His Father is possible for the Father to say at any and every time “Today I have begotten you.” Today! That, brothers and sisters, is the day of eternity spoken of in Micah 5:2. And that is just another way of talking about the fullness, the fullness of deity, with which God the Son is continuously and completely filled. The church is the fullness of the one who is filled, completely and (take your pick of adjectives here) continuously or eternally.

In other words, this final clause of ch. 1 is a bold-faced statement of the deity of Christ. Jesus is the one in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, as the parallel passage in Colossians puts it. Just as my son is a man, so God’s son is God.

### **B. Paul’s Point: Filling Christ Is the Mightiest of all God’s Mighty Workings!**

Why does this phrase appear where it does? Logically, it is the climax of the entire list of ways in which God’s mighty power worked. God’s power was mighty in raising Christ from the dead. It was mighty in seating Him at the Father’s right hand. It was mighty in putting all things under His feet, and mightier still in giving Him to the church. But it was mightiest of all in filling Christ! Think about it. It takes power to raise the dead. It takes more power to bring someone up to Heaven. It takes power over every created thing to place someone over every created thing. But it takes power over deity to give a divine person away.

We can imagine ruling the entire world. We can imagine finding a way to conquer death. But we cannot imagine finding a way to force God to let us into Heaven — and we really cannot, as unaided human beings, imagine being able to give a divine person away. But God gave Christ

to the church! The Father is so powerful that He was simply able to say, “This is my beloved Son, and now He is yours too — your savior, your master, your lord, your redeemer.” But Paul climaxes this series of statements about the working of God’s mighty power by saying that God continuously and completely fills Christ. This is not just partial power over deity; this is not just the ability to take an existing God and give Him away. This is the sum of all power over omnipotence. God is able to reproduce another divine person, another like Himself. God has such mastery over everything, including Himself, that He can give Himself away, give His own fullness to His Son.

Brothers and sisters, does that blow your mind? Obviously, some of you are thinking “Well, He has no choice but to beget His Son and so this isn’t really particularly amazing. God can’t help; it is just natural to Him to have a Son.” Well, so it is. God necessarily has a Son and necessarily breathes forth His Holy Spirit. But He also wants His Son and Spirit; He perfectly loves them and they perfectly love Him. He doesn’t want to stop, and so the fact that He “can’t” is really neither here nor there. God’s mighty power is not only sufficient to raise the dead, to bring to Heaven, to subdue the world: God’s mighty power is sufficient to beget a Son who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable just like His Father. And this is the power that Paul wants you and me to know! Obviously, we know it by experiencing it. We know it by knowing Jesus, by experiencing the reality that He is God eternally begotten of the Father and eternally equal with the Father. It is only through the Holy Spirit that we can know this truth. But when you have the Holy Spirit, He does indeed reveal to us that the Jesus we know is the omnipotent Son of the Father.

Unless you know God as the Father of such a Son, and unless you love Him as the Father of such a Son, you’ve missed it. One of the biggest reasons that Jesus came and that God gave us the Bible is so that we would magnify and glorify and adore Jesus Christ! You see, that’s why we’re circling back around for an entire sermon on this final clause of ch. 1. You and I need to know hope, know riches, and know power. Ultimately, to know all of those things is to know a person, and that person is Jesus. Do you know Him as the one who is continuously and completely filled by the Father — filled with deity itself? You don’t know God’s eternal generation by being eternally generated; you know God’s eternal generation by knowing the one who is eternally generated, whose going forth is from of old, from the day of eternity.

To know God, you need to know the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. You need to know the hope, riches, and power that come to you in Christ. But ultimately, to understand and make sense out of all the rest of it, you need to know the reality that Jesus Christ was begotten of His Father before all worlds, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father — and that by Him all things were made. It is this One who has come down for us and for our salvation.

## **II. Christ, the Man for Others, v. 23**

It is in this coming down for our salvation that Christ reveals Himself and thus reveals the Father and the Spirit. He came down as, we might say, “the man for others.” This phrase was made

popular by theological liberalism around the turn of the 20th century, and at that time it was used to advance all kinds of heretical and false ideas. But it is capable of an orthodox sense, and that orthodox sense is simply that Christ receives. He receives from God and He receives, in a certain sense, from us as well. Our text highlights two ways in which He receives, and we will also glance briefly at a third way in which He receives (though direct mention of it is not present in our text this morning). Christ is a man for others because He is humble enough to receive from others, even though He has by nature everything He could possibly need.

**A. Christ as Ruler Receives Fullness from the Church, v. 23b**

He receives fullness from us, His church! We talked about this last Sunday at length, and we won't rehash it all. Suffice it to say that Christ is head of the church; mediator between God and us; and ruler over the citizens of His kingdom. Without a church, without citizens in His kingdom, He would not be head and mediator. He receives what Paul calls "fullness", not in His person but in His rulership, from us. We really do contribute to His rulership. His Kingdom would not be what it is without us as subjects in it. Can you believe it, Christian? Do you see yourself as completing Christ's rule? If you do, of course, you will be eager to submit to His rule. You will want His mediation on your behalf. You will rejoice in Christ your head, and you will constantly approach the Father through His mediation.

**B. Christ as Son Receives His Divine Being from His Father, v. 23c**

But in addition to receiving fullness in His rulership from the church, Christ receives fullness in His person from His Father. The divine nature belongs to the Father, who nonetheless gives it over completely to His Son to be the Son's in its entirety. Of course, the Father gives His nature and retains it too — and a pale shadow of this is found in human begetting, whereby I give my human nature to my son, and yet retain it. But the humanity of my son is only generically the same as my humanity. We are separate instantiations of human nature. Contrastingly, the deity of God's Son is not generically the same as the Father's deity; the Son's deity is numerically the same as the Father's deity. They are one and the same God.

The divine nature is God in and of itself. Yet Christ holds this divinity as a gift from His Father. He is continuously and completely filled with His Father's deity. Again, what Christ reveals to us is His humility. He is God over all, yet He receives! He reveals the Father's generosity: He is God Almighty, yet He gives it all to His Son and Spirit.

In the church, we think so often of Christ as giver that we rarely take the time to think of Him as recipient. Christ receives from His Father and from us; the Father gives Him being as Son of God, and we give Him honor and glory and praise and obedience. Have you thought of that lately? We give to Christ every week when we pass the offering plate as part of the regular worship of this church. But we should be giving to Him every day, every hour, every minute. God is not too proud to receive from you!

**C. Christ as Man Receives His Humanity from the Triune God**

One more thing Christ receives that we can touch on here, though our text does not mention it, is that Christ receives His humanity from God. The entire Trinity fabricated His human body; the

uncreated, Begotten one took a created nature in personal union to Himself. He became a man, a creature, a bag of water just like us.

Do you thank God for making you what you are? Jesus can (and does) too. Do you depend on God for your existence? So does Jesus, humanly speaking. He is continuously and completely filled with all His Father's fullness, and yet He knows what it's like to be limited, created, dependent. This is our Messiah: God and man, two natures in one person, forever.

#### **D. The Implications**

So what are the implications of this truth? How should you and I respond to the reality that Christ is eternally begotten of His Father?

##### **1. Celebrate the Fatherhood and Sonship at the Heart of the Universe**

First of all, we should celebrate the truth that Fatherhood and Sonship are at the heart of the universe. If you are a parent, know that the mystery of how you pass down your humanity to your children, how the flame of life inside you lights the flame of life inside them without loss to itself is merely an echo of the greater truth that God's divinity belongs completely to Him and just as completely to His eternally begotten Son. If you are a child, recognize that the life your parents gave to you is an echo, a reflection, of the life that the Father gives His Son from all eternity. The most basic relationship of your life, your relationship to the one who begot you and the one who bore you, is designed to remind you to adore and worship Jesus Christ and His Father. This thing that is so important to us is not secondary, not irreligious; it must always serve to us as a reminder of how important Fatherhood and Sonship are to God, and how much He loves His Son and how much His Son loves Him.

##### **2. Worship Christ's Divine Majesty**

Secondly, we should worship Christ for His divine majesty. He is truly God Almighty, come in the flesh for us and for our salvation. Brothers and sisters, do you focus on worshipping Christ as your almighty Lord and God? Do you recognize Him as both a man like you and as God unlike you? We need to praise Him, to obey Him, to ascribe honor to Him with our mouths and with our lives. If engaging in fatherhood and sonship is part of your daily routine, so should worship be!

##### **3. Be Humbled by Christ's Humility!**

But even as you recognize the majesty of Christ your God, be amazed, be awed, be humbled by His humility. He is willing to receive from His Father everything that He is — and He is willing to receive from us everything that it is fitting to ascribe to Him. We all know people who are quite impressed with themselves and who are not at all interested in letting us complete them. But Christ welcomes us as His fullness! He does not count it shame to receive from His Father everything that He has. And we too must not count it shame to receive from our Father everything that we have. It is our greatest honor and privilege to be part of the fullness of Jesus Christ. Abroad, many of us might be ashamed of our current national leaders. But imagine being able to go abroad and say, "My ruler is George Washington" or "My ruler is Nelson Mandela" or some other figure that the world at large (rightly or wrongly) regards with respect and awe.

Jesus Christ is humble enough to receive. Are you?

#### **4. Be Filled with the Fullness of Christ**

If you are, then receive from Him! From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. And from His fullness, the fullness He's received from His Father, we all need to keep receiving. Paul will later pray that the Ephesians might be filled with all the fullness of God. Do you seek this fullness? Do you ask for it? Do you believe in a God who will grant you fullness like this? He will. You simply need to ask Him for it. You see, the Christian life is not about doing better and being better. It is about receiving the fullness of Jesus Christ.

#### **5. If You Love Jesus, and You and the Father Have Something in Common**

Had you ever considered that if you love Jesus, you and the Father share something in common? The Father loves His Son, and if you love Jesus too, then the Father loves you! Do you rejoice with Him over His Son? Do you tell Him how wonderful Jesus is?

We all know that human parents love to hear how wonderful their children are. Well, that's because they are like God, who loves to hear how wonderful His Son. What should you pray about? Pray about how wonderful Jesus is!

#### **6. In Christ, You Have God as Your Father**

And if you're lonely and fatherless, or if you have a good earthly father, either way, one of the greatest gospel privileges you have is that God is now your Father in Christ. Do you realize how valuable this relationship is? Do you glory in it? Does this divine paternity define your life? It should. When you realize that Jesus is the eternally begotten of the Father, continuously and completely filled, you too need no longer be empty. You can be always filled by your Father, full of Christ, full of the Spirit, and therefore full of love, joy, peace, and all the rest of it. Jesus is continuously and completely filled — and that is good news for all the empty, for all the poor in spirit. Amen.