

Does Colossians 2:9 teach that Jesus is "The Fulness of the Godhead in Bodily Form"?

"For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col.2:9 KJV).

On a surface reading Colossians 2:9 appears to be a beautifully strong Trinitarian statement. It seems to say Jesus is fully God in a human body. That is, of course, if one reads it with Trinitarian "glasses" on. But upon a careful reading that beauty is only skin deep! So, let's see if we can't find what the real "substance" is.

Whenever anybody "throws me" with a question I have not before examined, I have learned that the method of dealing with it is to always ask the person straight out, "What's the context of the verse?" "What is the subject the author is speaking about?" Jesus often answered a question with a question, and it's a good method! So, this throws the onus back on the questioner to see if they are not just quoting a well-worn text out of context and that they really do understand the big picture being addressed (it also gives you time to collect your thoughts!).

The immediate context in which Col. 2:9 sits concerns Paul's "great struggle" for the Colossians and the Laodiceans and anybody who has not personally met him, that they might come to "the full assurance of understanding" of all that God the Father has done and is doing "in Messiah Jesus" (2:1-2). Paul has already outlined what the Gospel message has done for these believers in chapter 1, and he encourages them to "continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast" and not "be moved away from the hope of the Gospel" (1:23), etc. What was the threat Paul was in agony over concerning the Colossian believers?

The particular doctrinal danger the Colossians were prone to was Gnosticism. The Gnostics claimed knowledge of cultic secrets that only the "initiated" were privileged to see. They were claiming to know "mysteries" not revealed to anybody but the initiated. These Gnostics were making the Christians at Colossae feel they were missing out on the real deal. They needed more!

In contrast, Paul defines the "mystery" of the Christian faith not as a closed secret for the privileged few, but as something openly, gloriously "manifested" (1:26) for anybody and everybody in the world who will accept it. In fact, God "willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery" to Gentiles as well as to Jews, so that "every man" in the church might be "complete" (or mature) in Christ" (1:28). But evidently the new believers in Colossae were being seriously tempted by a dangerous hybrid that was claiming super-knowledge in addition to the apostolic message that Christ was sufficient.

Paul warns them not to be taken in by this "false deception" and empty philosophy, even if for example, somebody says they had a dream, or an angel visited them, or a spirit told them there is more knowledge outside of Christ to be had (2:8, 18)! These extra revelations are a mere "shadow" (2:17). Such deception will rob the Christian of "the substance" which is in Christ who is the Head of the body, which is His church

(1:18; 2:17,19). To leave the doctrine of Christ is not to enter new horizons of deep knowledge but to subject one's self to "traditions of men" and to "base elements of this world" and to become dominated by the "fleshly mind"(2:8,18,20).

With that very brief background and context, we are ready to approach 2:9. But first, let's get some basic grammar right. The King James Version is known and loved by many and here reads, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." But the word for "Godhead" is a special word that should be correctly read as "the Deity" (*Theotees*). Trinitarians love the word "Godhead" for it conveys their concept of three Persons in one God-head, that is, a plurality in unity. But anybody with a modicum of Bible understanding knows "the Deity" refers to a single Person Who is YHWH in the Hebrew Bible, or as Paul defines him in this very letter, "God our Father" and "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Messiah" (1:3). Indeed, Paul has already told us that Jesus Christ "is the image of the invisible God" (1:15), and everybody knows an image is not the Original, but a reflection or representation of the Original! Bottom line is that "Godhead" is not a Bible word! The NASB has done a good job of correcting this error and reads *Theotees* as "the Deity".

Second grammar lesson. Some translators take the liberty of directing the reader towards their stated Trinitarian position by adding the word "form" after the word "bodily". The NASB now goes off and reads, "For in Him all the fulness of [the] Deity dwells in bodily form." But the Greek adverb "bodily" in the context just outlined is not speaking of a physical "bodily form" of Christ. It is correctly to be understood as "substantively", that is, relating to the substance or "solid reality". How so?

Well, the translators really believe this is the case down in 2: 17 where they translate the very same word "body" as "substance" ... "the substance belongs to Christ". It would not make sense to translate, "the physical bodily form belongs to Christ" in verse 17! Context won't allow that, because the shadows of Gnosticism are being contrasted with the "body", that is, the substantive reality found in Messiah who is the Head of the Church.

If I may use an illustration that I think beautifully conveys 2:9, it's like the carpet salesman who comes to your house. You want new carpet for the lounge room. The salesman brings his bag of carpet samples. He flips through them all and you consider each one. Finally, you ask, "But isn't there anything else? Is this all you have?" He says, "The whole factory is here!" We know what he means, and it's not that the whole factory stockpiles of carpet are in the bag. But everything you see in his sample bag represents perfectly what the factory has in stock.

It is so with our Lord Jesus. He is not the Deity, not the [whole] Factory. Everything we look for in God, we find perfectly displayed in Christ. All else is deceptively inadequate. Indeed, if you follow anybody else or any other's teachings, you will be robbed of the substance, for the "body" belongs to Christ. He who sees Him sees the Father (John 14:9). He "is the image of the Invisible God" (Col. 1:15).

And let's not forget the following verse, "And you are complete (literally, having been filled full) in Him..." Remember, in verse 9 the fulness (*pleeroma*) is in the Deity and is found substantively in Christ. As we remain in Christ we have "been filled" (same base

word as *pleroma*). Having been filled full in Christ does not make us Christ himself any more than Christ who is filled with God's fulness makes him God himself.

To summarize: In context and in agreement with the grammar, Paul is saying in Colossians 2:9 that in contrast to Gnostic shadows being offered them (2:8) all of the fulness of the Deity is truly, really, finally, found in Christ. To use Paul's repeat and explanatory phrase from verse 17, there is no empty or deceptive shadow in Christ, for "the substance --- the body --- belongs to Christ".

So, on closer inspection, and without our Trinitarian glasses distorting the context and the grammar, we discover Trinitarian beauty is only skin deep. The substance is the truth that Jesus Christ mediates to us all we need to know and enjoy God fully. Outside of Jesus and his gospel-word everything else is a mere shadow!