

The Fullness of God

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Bible Text: Ephesians 3:17-19
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Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter three. We began last week a study of the second of Paul's prayers in the book of Ephesians. Paul is praying for these Ephesians believers on their behalf that they would be strengthened according to the power of God in the inner man through his Spirit.

Let's read Ephesians chapter three beginning in verse 14.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.¹

Heavenly Father, that is our prayer this morning for ourselves and for one another that we would, indeed, be strengthened with your might, your power in the inner man, that through your Spirit working in our lives Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, that he might feel right at home in our lives because he is our Lord and we have submitted ourselves to him. And having done this because we are rooted and grounded in love we pray that we might appreciate and understand and comprehend with all the saint what is the length and breadth and height and depth and what is the greatness and vastness of the love of Christ for us. And having done this, Lord, we pray that we might be filled up to all the fullness of God pleasing you in our every action and thought. Lord, open our minds to your truth this morning. May your Spirit be active illuminating, applying divine truth to our lives. We ask it now in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Verses 14 through 21 of chapter three are, indeed, a unit. For the sake of time we are dividing them up. We have divided them up and we last time dealt and examined together the central request of Paul's [?].

¹ Ephesians 3:14-19.

Paul, in praying, has a central thrust, a central request that he makes on behalf of these Ephesian believers and that comes in verse 16 through the first part of verse 17. Paul prays that God would grant these believers, “according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”²

And so, as we saw last week, we are dependent not only to God for salvation, but we continue to be dependent upon God and upon his strength and power in our lives for progress in the Christian life. The inner man is weak and unable in and of his own strength to do that which God wants him to do. And so we need God’s empowering, God’s enabling in our lives in order to live lives that are pleasing to him.

And the result of this when God has strengthened us on the inner man, our lives begin to be conformed to the person of Christ.

And so Paul can say that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. As we saw, he is not talking about Christ indwelling the believer at the moment of salvation, but Christ taking up permanent residence in the sense of Christ making himself at home in our lives. Slowly and sometimes quickly, even, renovating our lives, chucking out the old stuff and bringing in the new in such a way that he becomes quite at home in our lives, dwelling in our hearts through faith as we trust him day by day.

Now having studied already, then, the central requests of Paul’s prayer, this morning we are going to see the purpose of Paul’s prayer. We have seen the central request. This morning we are going to see the central purpose of Paul’s prayer.

Another way of saying that is we are going to see the desired result of Paul’s prayer. Paul is praying to the Lord, to God who has all power, is the great namer over all things. And because he is praying and he has a specific request in mind, there is a specific result that he wants to see accomplished in the lives of these Ephesian believers, indeed in the lives of all believers.

What does Paul want to see happen? What is the result he desires? This is what we will see this morning in the purpose of Paul’s prayer.

So we will see in actuality two purposes for Paul’s prayer this morning. Another way we can say that is two ways in which our lives can be impacted as a result of being strengthened in the inner man, two ways in which our lives are changed or transformed as a result of having been strengthened by God’s power through the Spirit in the inner man. There is a radical change that takes place. There is a radical effect. And Paul states two of these effects and results and, therefore, purposes of his prayer.

The first thing Paul tells us in this prayer is that we will grow in our comprehension of Christ’s love. That is his desired result. That is what he wants to see happening in the lives of these believers and, again, in the lives of all believers. And that is what will

² Ephesians 3:16-17.

happen in our lives when the power of God is strengthening us internally, spiritually on the inner man, when we are dependent upon him, seeking him for guidance, for strength, for endurance. This is what we can expect to see happen. We will grow in our comprehension of Christ's love and that is the first purpose or result of Paul's prayer.

We see that in verse 17, the last part of verse 17. He says:

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.³

Now, Paul is piling on some strange things there it seems to us anyway. He is talking about breadths and lengths and heights and depths and knowing that which cannot be fully known and hard for us to understand this, it seems, particularly as Paul begins. He says you are "being rooted and grounded in love."⁴

Paul is mixing his metaphors here. He uses an agricultural phrase and then he uses an architectural phrase. First he says we are rooted and then he says we are grounded. Well, even though these are dissimilar in terms of their reference the point, however, is singular. The point that Paul says here is that the believer's life has been founded on love, divine love. The believer has been rooted and grounded in love, God's love for them.

Love is both the source of the Christian's strength, rooted, and the foundation of his existence, grounded. This includes God's love for them in choosing them, God's love for them as seen in his sealing of them and in blessing them with every spiritual blessing in Christ as we saw all of that in Ephesians chapter one.

God has manifestly demonstrated his love for the believer. And so the believer has been rooted and grounded in this love.

Romans 5:5 Paul says, "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."⁵

God, as it were, unleashed a torrent of love into our hearts through his Spirit. God poured out his love in our hearts. This rooting and grounding, however, not only encompasses God's love, but it also includes our love for one another.

Jesus, of course, gave the two great commandments: Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets can be summarized in those two

³ Ephesians 2:17-19.

⁴ Ephesians 2:17.

⁵ Romans 5:5.

great commands. Not only are we to love God in response to his love for us, but we are to love one another.

So, truly, we have been rooted and grounded in love.

1 John 4:19 says, “We love, because He first loved us.”⁶

Because of God’s initiating love, we can now love him and we now can love one another. Our lives are rooted and grounded in love. Love is the very foundation of the Christian’s life. Love is central to our lives.

With this understanding, then, Paul states it as a fact, he says, “You, being rooted and grounded in love,”⁷ this is a fact, this is how you have come to have your existence because of God’s love. With that in mind Paul says, he prays that they might be, “able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.”⁸

Paul prays that they will have comprehension. He wants them to comprehend something. He wants them to understand and appreciate something. But what is it that Paul wants them to comprehend? What is it that he wants them to understand and appreciate?

He says he wants them to understand and appreciate the breadth and length and height and depth, but the breadth and length and height and depth of what? What is he referring to here?

Well, verse 19, I believe, supplies us with the answer. “The breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.”⁹

He wants them to know, to comprehend, the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, the love of Christ. Paul’s purpose here in using these dimensional terms—some have called them the four magnitudes, breadth, length, height, depth—his purpose is to try and map out the enormity of Christ’s love, the vastness of his love for us.

See, Christ’s love, as Paul presents it here, is not some one dimensional love. It is not a simple basic love. It is a complex, intricate, immeasurably vast expanse. It is as broad as it is long and it is as high as it is deep.

Turn with me to John’s gospel, John chapter 13.

John chapter 13 is, of course, that pivotal chapter where the Lord is preparing for his final meal with his disciples there in the upper room. It is the night of his betrayal and trial and the night before his crucifixion.

⁶ 1 John 4:19.

⁷ Ephesians 3:17.

⁸ Ephesians 3:18.

⁹ Ephesians 3:18-19.

John 13 and verse one.

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”¹⁰

Now this speaks of the vastness of Christ’s love. He knows what is awaiting him. He knows what is coming. He even knows the betrayal that is about to take place here in this very room and yet having loved his own, he loved them to the end or to the full, to the max. He wasn’t committed to them in loving them simply in the good times. He loved them in the hard times. He loved them to the full. He loved them to the max. Jesus’ love, Christ’s love is immense and it is vast.

Later on in John, John 15 and verse 13 Jesus says, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”¹¹

There is no greater love than to lay down your life, to sacrifice your own well being for the well being of another. There is no greater love than that, Jesus said, and he, of course, exemplified that perfectly only hours later.

The vastness of Christ’s love is what Paul wants every believer to comprehend, to understand and appreciate the love of Christ and the many facets that are involved.

In contemplating the great love of God and the love of Christ, one poet wrote this.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Such is the vastness of the love of Christ. Such is the task for you and I in Christ to understand, comprehend and appreciate that love displayed for us.

Commenting on this verse in Ephesians chapter three about the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love John Stott says the following. “The love of Christ is broad enough to encompass all mankind, long enough to last for eternity, deep enough to reach the most degraded sinner and high enough to exalt him into heaven.”

Now, I don’t think that Paul necessarily had those associations in mind with each of those

¹⁰ John 13:1.

¹¹ John 15:13.

dimensions. Paul is simply trying to give you a sense of the immensity of the love of Christ.

But I think those are good applications.

If we were going to make it a little more focused on the present context and keep it focused on the book of Ephesians we might say it this way. The love of Christ is broad enough to include both Jew and Gentile as we have just studied in chapter three. It is long enough to choose us before the foundation of the world in chapter one and verse four. It is high enough to secure for us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, chapter one and verse three. And it is deep enough to reach down to us who were spiritually dead in our transgressions and sins in chapter two verses one through three. That is what the love of Christ has done for us, all those things. It is broad. It is high. It is long. It is deep.

And a lifetime, indeed, an eternity of reflection about this will not bring all that is true to our minds.

You know, we are not a very reflective, contemplative society as a whole. Oh, there are some individuals, you know, who like to stop and get away and get quiet and just contemplate things, just think about things, think through things.

Most of us aren't that way.

The most contemplation we have in a given day is what we are going to order from the menu, you know? What will it be today? Our lives are busy. We hurry about. We run around. We fill our lives. We spend our time talking together in the morning and we kiss everyone good bye as we head off to work. We get in our car and we put in a tape or a CD or we listen to the radio to music. We get to work and we spend our time there being productive on other things, probably not contemplative things that we would just like to sit around and think about.

Come home, it is the same thing.

There is very little time in our lives when we can just stop and think about any given subject deeply, significantly.

But this is what Paul prays for in their lives, that they, by God's power working in them, having been strengthened in the inner man, might be able to comprehend with all the saint what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.

The vastness of Christ's love is seen, again, in verse 19 where Paul says that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge, not that it cannot be known at all, but it surpasses a complete, comprehensive understanding. It surpasses our ability to master the subject. That is the complexity and the depth and the breadth of the love of Christ.

How many of us have even begun to scratch the surface of Christ's love for us in terms of our comprehension of it? Paul says it surpasses knowledge. We can't fully plumb the depths of this great love. We can't completely soar to the heights of it because it is ultimately beyond us in terms of comprehension, full comprehension.

While we may know much about it, we cannot fully master it.

In so many ways the love of Christ is like the ocean. While we know much about it, it remains in many ways the final frontier. There are vast stretches of the ocean, vast portions that have gone largely unexplored and are still largely unknown and they are on this very planet.

Some scientists have said that they lament the fact that we probably know more about the moon and its surface than we do about the earth and most of its surface because much of it is sealed off from us under water.

Well, one hymn writer in reflecting upon the great love of Christ wrote the great hymn *Oh, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*, my favorite hymn. I am just going to read it for you. You can say thank you later.

Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!
Underneath me, all around me, is the current
Of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward to
Thy glorious rest above!

Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Spread His praise from shore to shore!
How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth
never, nevermore!
How He watches o'er His loved ones,
died to call them all His own
how for them He intercedeth, watcheth
o'er them from the throne!

Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus,
'Tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee!

When God is exercising his love in our lives, strengthening us in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, we will necessarily be reflecting significantly upon the deep and abiding vastness that is the love of Christ for us.

We cannot be growing in godliness, we cannot be growing in Christ likeness if we are not at the same time observing, appreciating and coming to a fuller understanding of the great love of Christ for us.

So Paul prays for their strengthening in the inner man in order that they might comprehend this great love of Christ.

This is our life's long task. Do you realize that? This is what God wants us to do. He wants us to contemplate the great love of his Son, Jesus Christ. We are to be life long students. Indeed, we will be eternal students, ever studying, ever coming to a fuller understanding of the great love of Christ for us.

It is our eternal task to grow and grow in our comprehension and appreciation for the boundless love of Christ.

Now it is important to note here that this comprehension, this growing in knowledge and appreciation is available to all believers, to all the saints, Paul says, that you may understand and comprehend with all the saints, verse 18, what is the breadth, height, depths and length.

You see, in Paul's day there was a common sect and a common philosophy of religion, as it were, called Gnosticism. It was growing and developing, but it was present in an incipient way in Paul's day. And Gnosticism said that only certain individuals can attain the secret knowledge. Only certain initiates could have that higher knowledge of existence and of awareness.

And so it was an elite group who got to that point and attained that point. Paul says here, "No, this is knowledge for all the saints."

If you have been redeemed by God through his Son Jesus Christ, then this comprehension can be yours through God's power working in the inner man.

They were to comprehend the immense love of Christ and they were to share this comprehension with each other. And so the first purpose for which Paul prays for this inner strengthening on their part is that they might comprehend with all the saints the greatness of the love of Christ.

The second purpose is related to the first. But it is that we would be filled with all the fullness of God. Paul prays that they would be strengthened in the inner man, that they might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now what is Paul talking about here?

Well, this second purpose that Paul lists for praying for them serves as a kind of ultimate purpose. There are lesser purposes and then there are greater purposes and this is the greater purpose. It is a summarizing purpose, if you will. It is a kind of final destination. This is the final product that Paul wants to see. This is the final result that he would like to see in their lives. Paul wants them to be strengthened in the inner man so that Christ

will dwell in their hearts through faith so that they will know the love of Christ, so that they will be filled with all the fullness of God.

You see the string is put together in that way.

The fullness of God, what is that? The fullness of God is the totality of God's being, the totality of God's being, God's fullness.

We read this morning from Colossians that all the fullness dwelt in Christ, all the fullness of deity. There wasn't anything lacking in Christ in terms of deity. The fullness of God was there.

And so here Paul prays that the fullness of God would be in their lives. They would be filled up to all the fullness.

The fullness of God is similar to speaking of the glory of God, the glory of God. The glory of God is kind of that summary attribute that sums up who God is. Or it is another way of saying the name of God. The name of God summarizes who he is.

So fullness sums up God's moral excellence and his limitless power. And so Paul wants these Christians to be filled up with this fullness that God would be active in their lives. It means that their lives, by being filled up, would be completely controlled by God himself.

We will read later in Ephesians about being filled with the Holy Spirit. That means being controlled by, dominated by, led by. It means that I, Lance, am lost and God reigns supreme in my life. Lance takes the back seat. God takes the driver's seat. This is what he wants to see happen.

In short, he is praying for their full maturity, that they would be mature, that they would be godly, that they would be Christ like.

He is praying that they would lead a holy, Spirit controlled life, a Christ centered and Christ following life, a God honoring and God glorifying life.

See, when we are born again there is a scriptural expectation of continued growth. We are not expected to be born again and simply never grow. Indeed, that whole concept of new birth and being born again, even as a young child, a baby grows up and goes through different stages of development until they reach the mature man, adulthood able to do all those things, all those proficiencies that adults are able to do. In a similar way this is what the Scriptures expect of us, that we will go through various stages of development until we reach a mature place of spiritual adulthood.

Paul had to chide the Corinthians because he couldn't speak to them as adults, but he had to speak to them like babies. He couldn't give them meat. He had to give them milk.

They were not progressing as they should have been. And so there is a scriptural expectation that we will grow.

This is God's will for your life, that you would grow up in Christ Jesus, that you become more and more like Christ and, thus, become more and more filled up to the fullness of God, reflecting his character, sharing his priorities, following his lead. And a deeper comprehension of Christ's great love always leads to further godliness. You don't have further godliness without a deeper comprehension of Christ's love and you don't have a godless life when you have a further comprehension of Christ's love. They go hand in hand. One leads to the other. One is dependent upon the other.

And so that is what Paul prays for.

So let's trace Paul's prayer backward. Look with me, if you will.

Start at the end of verse 19 and we are just going to go backwards. Paul wants us to be filled with the fullness of God. What is that? Maturity, control directed by God himself. He wants us to be filled up to all the fullness of God.

To do this we must comprehend and know the immeasurable love of Christ. How can we do that? In order to do that we have to have this knowledge of the love of Christ. We must have Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith.

How is that going to happen? For this to happen God must strengthen us according to his power through his Spirit in the inner man.

So, you see, that is the point it all goes back to. It goes back to that central request that we, as weak and needy individuals with a flesh and a fallenness are dependent upon God and his active power in our lives. That is why I said last week, this is the key to your spiritual success. It is the key to your spiritual growth. It is God's power working in you. We are all dependent upon it and we must all be seeking it and earnestly praying for that power in our lives and in the lives of one another. We are not going to grow, we are not going to progress in the Christian life apart from God's active power in our lives. And that active power is dispensed through his Spirit in response to the prayers of his people.

We are a dependent people upon God, dependent not only for salvation, but dependent for our growth in Christ.

Well, you say, "I haven't. I don't know, I guess I am still a baby in Christ. I haven't grown a whole lot."

Well, have you asked for it?

Jesus said, "You have not because you have asked not."¹²

¹² James 4:2.

Have you asked for God's active power in your life to strengthen you in the inner man so that Christ may dwell there through faith so that little by little the rooms of your life would be completely renovated so that Christ feels right at home? And feeling right at home, you be able to contemplate further and deeper and more significantly upon his love for you, the abiding love of Jesus Christ and having comprehended that, being filled up to all the fullness of God.

It all goes back to God's power working in us. We are dependent upon it. Are we seeking it? Are we asking for it? Are we beseeching the Lord on behalf of one another for it? Do we ask that God's power might be mighty in our presence as a church so that we as individuals and, therefore, as believers coming together would be transformed into Christ likeness and would be, together, coming together to exalt the name of Jesus Christ and his vast love for each one of us?

Or are we happy enough simply to contemplate the menu?

Without God's power we can do nothing. Without seriously reflecting upon the love of Christ we will make no progress. Without being filled up to all the fullness of God we will never see maturity. And all of it goes back to our dependence upon God himself and his mighty power working within us so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.

Lord, this is what we want. This is what we need. We recognize that it is so easy to live our lives, day in and day out, week after week, busy, filling our schedules with clutter and with things and with appointments that in the end really aren't going to matter. Help us to ask ourselves the question: When was the last time I thought significantly? When I was the last time I thought deeply about the love of Christ for me?

As we have sung this morning about that great love and the testament to that love, the nails in your hands and the thorns in your brow, they tell me how much you loved me.

When was the last time we significantly thought about the love you have shown toward us on the cross? Which testifies to the fact that God's power is at work mightily in our hearts. For the result will be we will think significantly about the love of Christ.

So we pray that this morning, that your power, through your Spirit would strengthen us in the inner man, to strengthen our weakness that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith and that we might comprehend with all the saints what is the height and the depth and breadth and length and to appreciate and understand and really know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. We ask that the ultimate result will be that each one of us might be filled up to all the fullness of God. And we ask it for your glory and the name of your Son. Amen.

Change of Voice:

It might be appropriate if we change our closing song to hymn....