

“How Much Does God Love You?
And What Difference does it Make?”
Ephesians 3:14-19
Dr. Jerry Nelson

READ Ephesians 3:14-21

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

What is your goal for your Christian life?

Do you have a goal or goals for your spiritual life?

Regarding other dimensions of your life, even if they aren't written out, you probably have goals, socially, physically, or financially.

- You want to get married,
- you want to improve your marriage,
- you want to rear your children to be responsible Christians and citizens,
- you want to exercise more regularly or lose 10 pounds,
- you want to get your student loans and credit cards paid off,
- you want to be able to give more, you want to build a college fund for your children and a retirement fund for yourself.

What are your goals for your **spiritual** life?

God has a goal for you and for me – individually and collectively.

Sometimes we reduce Christianity to being only about the past and the future – about the forgiveness of sins in the past and to heaven when we die.

And certainly Christianity is about those two great truths.

The forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life with God are very important but they are still only introductory truths to all that God has for us.

In the first 2 ½ chapters of Ephesians Paul has clearly articulated the great truths of what we might call “Christianity 101” –

Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone.

In the latter half of chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3, as we saw two weeks ago, he sets forth the great truth about the new people that God is creating.

God is calling people from every race, nationality, and ethnic group into one new family – the church.

Now, as he did at the end of chapter 1, he prays for this new society. And the prayer goes far beyond forgiveness and promise of a future.

He prays that, “you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

What does that mean?

As I have said many times before, God’s goal is not just to save a bunch of people from hell nor even to get a bunch of saved sinners into heaven, his goal has always been **to create a holy people**, a new race of Christ-followers, a new society of people, the church, **that truly bears the image of God**, reflects his character, acts as he acts – to be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

To understand this better I want you to think with me for a minute about Jesus’ relationship with the Father God.

What do the following verses teach us about Jesus?

- Colossians 1:19 “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in (Jesus).”
- Colossians 2:9 “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”
- Hebrews 1:3 “The Son (Jesus) is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his (God's) being...”

What is the point of these and other verses like them?

The point is that to see Jesus, is to see God.

All that the Father God is, Jesus is.

These are, of course, strong Scriptural proofs for the Deity of the man Jesus.

But it is not the deity I want you to focus on here, it is the likeness that I want you to see.

Jesus was the fullness of God in that he thought, spoke and acted as Father would.

So what does Paul mean when he prays that WE “would be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God?”

Later in this letter (Ephesians 4:13) Paul will say that God's goal in our lives is that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

That sounds very much like what he is saying in 3:19 “that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

To the Galatians (4:19) he said it this way “until Christ is formed in you.”

God's goal for us is that we would become like his Son who is in turn the “fullness” or the exact representation of the Father.

In other words God's goal is that we become like him.

Now I know that many of you have heard this before but don't dismiss this as a religious cliché or an impossible dream.

God doesn't dismiss it as unrealistic.

IN fact most of the NT is written not about becoming a Christian but about us becoming more like the Lord Jesus.

And in this passage of Scripture Paul doesn't dismiss it as fanciful but in fact he prays for it - he asks God to make it true in the lives of the Christians.

What would it look like if we were "filled to measure of all the fullness of God?"

The Bible says that this is a growth process that we will not complete until Jesus comes again.

But that is no excuse for giving up on the goal.

Paul said it this way of himself: Philippians 3:12-14 "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

God tells us that he wants us to become like him.

Paul prays as if it is possible for us to increasingly experience the fullness of God, to become more like God.

What would it look like if we were increasingly being "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God?"

There is a man in our church most of you have never heard of and only a few of you have met.

- He was born in Denver and has lived here all of his life.
- He and his wife live in a 800-1000 square foot house in which they have raised six children, five having graduated from college and the sixth choosing the police academy.
- He is probably nearing 70 years of age.
- He has been nearly totally disabled since his early 20s and in and out of hospitals too many times to remember.

I tell you about him not to make him out as perfect, he, his wife and children know better.

I tell you about him because I want you to see the possibilities for your own life.

I want you to see what God can do with a man who makes God's goal for his life, his own goal for his life.

If I put before you as models either Billy Graham or Mother Theresa you would probably not identify with them because you would consider their accomplishments to be the result of native abilities far beyond your own.

You'd be wrong, but that is what we naturally assume.

I also don't put Dr. Graham or Mother Theresa up as models because I don't know them – I mean **really** know them.

I've met them, I've read much about them, I heard testimonies about them – but I don't know them.

The man I tell you about I know as well as anyone can know someone not in his own family.

- For decades he has risen early in the morning to spend time with the Lord, to pray for me and for scores of others of you for hours on end.
- He has an old typewriter on which he types out prayer letters to each person for whom he is praying.
- I have read hundreds of those letters as he has prayed for me.
- I have spend enough time in those letters and with him to know his disposition, to see into his heart, to see something of his relationship with his wife, children, neighbors and hundreds for whom he has prayed through the years.

The injury many years ago changed his vocational plans radically. Largely unable to work and in severe pain for decades, he is a man who we would say has every "right" to be disappointed and even discouraged.

But I have never known a man more experienced in trusting God and more filled with gratitude for God's daily grace.

Do you know what I see, when I see him?

I see a man who is being filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

I see the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

God does not measure a man by the breadth of his ministry but by the depth of his character.

I say that because I see what God’s **goal** is for us – that we “may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

What is your goal for your spiritual life?

Because of sin or ignorance we are too content to live far below what God has in mind for us.

Because we don’t want to give up some of our sinful habits or because we don’t know the possibilities that exist in being more like Christ, we are willing to live daily with being barely saved, giving ourselves to other things, and hoping for heaven for when we die.

Others of us don’t dare to believe that we can truly change.

We have tried so hard in the past and we have failed so often and miserably that we have given up.

Christ-likeness has for us become nothing but a mirage, an illusion for the gullible.

And we content ourselves with simply hanging on spiritually.

Was Paul wasting his breath when he prayed that they and WE may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God?

Ephesians 3:16-19 “I pray that out of God’s glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the **love** of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

In this prayer, Paul declares our need for a supernatural work at the center of our being so that we would experience both the presence and love of Jesus.

Paul doesn't just **wish** good things would happen in the lives of these people he loves, he **prays** for them.

He prays to the one he calls **Father** – Paul is appealing to the nature of God as our heavenly Father, who would out of deepest affection give his children what the children need.

Didn't Jesus say, Matthew 7:9-11 "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

And he prays to the Father whom he knows has sufficient resources to grant the request: "I pray that out of his **glorious riches** he may..."

The words "out of" are more insightfully translated "according to".

One man may give from his riches while another gives **according to** his riches – who would you rather receive from?

God gives according to, commensurate with, equal to, his riches.

Or as the Bible puts it in Philippians 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Our prayers are not hollow exercises but instead we approach the one who has both the will (He is our "Father") and the limitless ability ("according to his glorious riches") to meet our needs.

And what does Paul want God to do?

Ephesians 3:16-17 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

He prays that God would do something for them at the very core of who they are.

The "inner being" and "heart" are virtually the same thing.

It is the "me" at the center of all I am.

It is our moral being, the seat of personal consciousness.

He prays that God will do a powerful, supernatural work at the very core of our being to strengthen our faith **to believe**, really believe, **that Christ dwells in us**.

He wants God to make us so aware of Christ's presence in us that we live life out of that awareness.

He wants God to work where we can't even see much less make changes – in our innermost being – the center of our personalities.

Changed from the inside out – transforming our values and will.

The central message of the Bible is that God lives with us – “Immanuel” – Christ in us!

The person of Jesus with thoughts, feelings, will, presence, is with us so intimately that God describes it as “in us”.

Paul prays that we may be conscious of Jesus' presence.

I really believe that in my early years I understood Christianity to be about facts and formula.

As to facts, I was asked to accept certain historical events as true: the preexistence, birth, death and resurrection of Jesus; that Christ died as a substitute for me.

As to formula, I was asked to pray a certain prayer: Confess that I was a sinner; Ask Jesus to forgive me based on his death for me; Then trust that he had forgiven me.

If I believed and asked God would “save” me.

None of that was wrong but it was so incomplete.

It didn't make explicit the most important issue of all – a relationship with Jesus.

It seemed to me that I could believe the facts and go through the formula and then voila it was done and that was all.

But I didn't meet a person; I ascribed to a doctrine and went through the mandatory initiation.

Yes, Jesus stood behind the events like George Washington stood behind the events of the Revolutionary War.

I belong to a free country because of what General Washington did but I have no relationship with him.
 And I might think that I belong to the Kingdom of God because of what Jesus did but still have no relationship with him.

It is this misunderstanding of Christianity that leaves so many of us believing we are Christians without having any personal relationship with Jesus and no particular desire for it.

J. B. Phillips wrote the book entitled, Your God is Too Small.

And in fact we **do have** too small a view of God.
 The God we imagine in our minds is too remote, disinterested, and uninvolved for us to expect anything from him or be engaged with him. (Snodgrass, 190)

With Paul I pray that we would meet Jesus, really meet him, trust him and KNOW that he is as present with us as being in us.

This past week I asked the friend I spoke of earlier to tell me what his relationship with Jesus is like.

I mean we can't see Jesus with our eyes, we can't actually hear him with our ears and we can't feel him with our hands.

So I asked my friend how real is Jesus to you in your everyday experience and what is it like?

He gave me several examples of the grace of God in his life but later in the day he called me.

"Do you remember the question you asked me about my relationship with Jesus?"

I said, "yes."

He said, "Let me tell you a quick story.

Some time back my daughter came to our house one evening with a friend.

We sat and talked for a while.

As they were leaving in the car, the friend asked my daughter if she had noticed that my wife and I were holding hands as we sat together talking to the two of them.

My daughter said she hadn't particularly noticed but wasn't surprised because, as she said it, they do it all the time.

My friend, explaining the nature of his relationship with Jesus, said, "That's what my relationship with Jesus is like."

Ephesians 3:16-17 Paul prayed that out of God's "glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

If you are trusting in Jesus as your saving-Lord, he is in you now. Paul prays that the Holy Spirit would strengthen your inner being, your heart, so that by faith you will recognize and live with an awareness of Jesus' presence every day.

But it is not just Jesus' presence that motivates us to "be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" – it is an awareness and experience of his love.

Ephesians 3:17-19 Paul writes, "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Paul wants God to strengthen their understanding and experience so that they increasingly grasp the immensity, the limitless extent, the depth of Christ's love for them – a love that surpasses knowing.

This is not a prayer that **we** love Christ more but that **we know how much he loves us!**

To "**know** this love that **surpasses knowledge**" is a way of saying that you can't fully take it in.

So immense is the love that you can't get your mind or heart fully around it.

It is like looking at some sunsets – no matter where you look it is beautiful, so beautiful that you are awestruck and speechless, you just can't take it all in.

You keep turning and looking and turning again attempting to capture it but you can't.

It is like being in love – everything you see reminds you of her, every conversation turns to her.

You can't find enough words or even think sufficient ideas to express the feelings inside.

And every encounter with her reveals a new dimension that leaves you wondering if you can possibly ever know her fully.

It is like the love for our children: I don't think my son has any idea of how **much** he is loved.

I can't possibly describe and I know he can't grasp how deep and permanent that love is.

My son may reach the day when he would reason that my love could be broken if he was sufficiently unlovely.

But imagine God's unconditional love for you – a love that can't be broken because it is not based on you but only on him.

Why does Paul want us to know the love of God in this way?

Because he knows that it is essential if we are going to mature in our faith – if we are going to become more like Christ – “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

We won't become mature without grasping this dynamic truth that we are loved unconditionally, limitlessly, and eternally.

It is only from that soil that spiritual maturity grows.

Otherwise our actions become self-motivated works attempting to measure up – and that leads further and further away from maturity.

Without a knowledge and experience of God's unconditional love, spiritual disciplines become works of the flesh rather than responses to grace.

But knowing we are loved, unconditionally loved, prepares the soil for real change, lasting change.

Dr. Perry Downs is a professor in our seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, in suburban Chicago.

Perry and his wife Sandy have taken in and cared for over 20 foster children through the years.

On one occasion they were asked to take twin 18-month-old boys.

The first night when the children were put to bed Perry noticed that not a sound came from their room.

Checking on them he found both of them crying but without making a sound.

The Downs discovered that theirs was the 9th home the boys had been in and in several of the homes before the boys had been beaten for crying.

Test revealed that the boys were irremediably damaged emotionally and intellectually.

Perry and Sandy kept those boys for two years until they were adopted out.

By that time, through the **relentless love** of Perry and Sandy, both boys were judged “normal” intellectually and emotionally.

Unconditional love was the soil that allowed the means of grace to take root and grow.

Love enabled them to mature. (From Carson, [A Call to Spiritual Reformation](#), 195-6)

The Apostle Paul prays because he knows that it will take a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit at the very core of our being for us to believe and experience the presence and love of Jesus with us.

And it is only from that foundation that we can “be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Kari Berglund discovered this truth.

The full text of her story is on our web site but let me give you a paraphrase of it:

“In 1991 when I accepted God’s grace for my salvation I failed to do one thing, to accept His grace for my LIFE. I grew up feeling like I couldn’t please anyone. I brought this with me into my Christian walk and became very legalistic about how I was to ACT in my new life.

Every time I messed up I would chide myself and ask for forgiveness from God and then commit to do better. I would do I all could to study my Bible and pray every day and to do all the other things that you are suppose to DO. (Did you notice how many times I said DO?) Of course I couldn’t keep it up, so the cycle happened over and over.

I lived like that up until two years ago when that life made me so miserable I couldn’t and didn’t want to continue. I wasn’t suicidal, but I was very angry, very depressed and felt like a complete failure. I remember at one of my lowest points I was driving past a church with a sign that read, “God loves you”. I felt so bad that I didn’t even want Him too.

Ten years into this cycle of defeat God changed my life. I discovered that even though I knew lots of what the Bible said about a relationship with Jesus, I was functioning as though I didn’t have one. I discovered that the life talked about in 1 John 5:12 (“Whoever has the Son has life”) isn’t only eternal life, but life with him now as well. I now cling to my relationship with Jesus rather than just trying to DO things for Him.”

150 years ago George Robinson captured the essence of Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3 with these words:

Loved with everlasting love, led by grace this love to know;
 Gracious Spirit from above, Thou has taught me it is so.
 O this full and perfect peace! O this transport all divine!
 In a love which cannot cease, I am his and he is mine.

His forever, only his; Who the Lord and me shall part?
 Ah, with what a rest of bliss, Christ can fill the loving heart!
 Heaven and earth may fade and flee; Firstborn light in gloom decline,

But while God and I shall be, I am his and he is mine.”

Oh, friends, Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3 is a prayer we need to pray often for ourselves and for others.

We need God’s Spirit to help us know the presence and love of Jesus in such measure that because of it we desire to be like him and are enabled to do so.

Ephesians 3:14-21

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

PRAY

Now listen to Paul’s confident benediction:

Ephesians 3:20-21

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.