

Ephesians 3:17-21 "Filled To Overflowing With God's Life and Love"

The last part of this third chapter of Ephesians really picks up where Paul left off in the first chapter as he was praising God and praying on behalf of the Church in Ephesus. His desire was to see God work in their lives to the extent that they would be built up in their faith and in their understanding of this redemptive work in their lives through Christ, which in turn effected their walk and service for the Lord.

Last week we saw the continuance of this prayer in EPH 3:14-16 "For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being..."

He then continues in EPH 3:17-19 "...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."

You'll notice in this prayer that Paul mentions a number of things. In verse 16 he prays that these Ephesian Christians may be strengthened with power through the Spirit of God. In verse 17 he gives the reason for that strengthening; "so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith."

He goes on to pray that they would be rooted and established in love for the specific purpose of grasping the immeasurable love of Christ so that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This is a tremendous prayer from Paul on behalf of the saints of God. This is also a prayer we should consider coming to God with for ourselves as well as on behalf of each other. When we think of prayer we usually have a tendency to consider asking for material things we need, or for personal matters involving knowing what God's will is for our lives as we ask for direction.

These are all legitimate ways of approaching God, but what Paul shows us in his prayer is that we should not lose sight of the bigger picture of how God wants us to grow in a way that begins to

comprehend the magnificence of His love gift and how we should view this gift in the way it effects our daily lives and the lives of people around us to God's glory.

And so we'll take a closer look at this this morning. You'll notice that there seems to be a theme. Paul speaks of strength and power which is associated with the Spirit of God. But this power and strength must be working in the context of the love of God as we're filled with the fullness of God and His love.

This is reminiscent of Paul's concern for the Church in Corinth, who seemed to be utilizing the power of God through certain gifts of the Spirit. But instead of being commended for such a use of power, Paul rebukes them for actually denying the power of the Spirit which is only truly used in the truth and the love of Spirit.

1CO 13:1-8 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love [agape], I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails...."

We can learn a number of things from this passage which we don't have the time to go into this morning, but one thing is worth noting. It is not the amount of gifts or even the type of gifts in a Church that determine the maturity of those people, either as a Body or as individuals. It is the way those gifts are used unto the honor and glory of God and to the edification of the saints.

We must never lose sight of the fact that a gift is just that, a gift. And what has so often happened in the Church-at-large is that once gifts have been dispensed to individuals by the Spirit it's very easy for the individual to think that they are more spiritual than others or that they now are the ones who determine how that gift must be used.

In fact, a gift is always meant to be used as the Giver intended. Any gift of the Spirit must be seen as a gift we must use to edify

each other and glorify our God in the process as we boast in our Savior and not in any particular gift.

Paul alludes to this in 1CO 4:7 "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

There's a trend in some quarters of the Church to one-up each other in their gifts. That's a self-centered approach to the gifts which are meant to be used to serve others.

1PE 4:10 "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

I could go on all morning on this topic, but I want to return to our text because in it we begin to see how God desires for us to be growing in the power of the Spirit, which is not to simply serve self, but that self may see how true agape love is meant to be used for others.

EPH 3:16-17 "I pray that out of his 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."

This seems like an odd statement in light of the fact that these people Paul is addressing already have Christ dwelling in their hearts through faith. You can't have Christ any other way than through faith in Him alone for your salvation.

So, he's not talking about the way in which these believers can get Christ to dwell in their hearts, rather he's talking about how these believers can walk in a way which shows Christ to be dwelling in their hearts.

It's a continual process whereby we submit to the Spirit and are strengthened by Him. This is what Paul means when he says in EPH 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

The phrase "*be filled*" carries the idea in the Greek of continually being filled. And the way that this is accomplished is through walking in the power of the Spirit by faith which verse 16 denotes, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Vincent in his N.T. word studies points out that this word "*dwell*" (in verse 17) carries with it the idea of settling down and abiding. And so, what Paul is saying here is that we must look to the only

One who can strengthen us by His Spirit for the purpose of having Christ settling down and abiding in our lives to the extent that His life is manifesting itself instead of our flesh trying to take center stage.

I also like the way Robertson in his "Word pictures in the N.T." puts this word *dwell*, which in the Greek is *katoikeo*. He says, *katoikeo* is an old verb, to make one's home. In other words, do people see that Christ lives in your life? Is He seen as being at home in you? Or is He sometimes not seen as being at home by the way we live?

We cannot truly fake this. It can only be done in the power of the Spirit which takes us right back to verse 16, but also propels us to the rest of our text starting at the end of verse 17.

Eph.3:17-19 "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."

Notice here that Paul associates power with being rooted and established in love. This is what I brought up earlier when we went to 1Cor.13. The words rooted and established in the NIV are better translated rooted and grounded.

Paul does an interesting thing here as he mixes his metaphors. The idea of being rooted carries with it the thought of having our roots go deep into life giving nourishment we find in Christ. But Paul also uses the term grounded or established which has reference to a building. And of course we know that Christ is the chief-cornerstone of the building.

Paul's point is that the Spirit of God enables us to be firmly established in our faith as we seek the One who laid the foundations of the earth and is the Rock of our salvation. But being rooted and grounded is to be rooted and grounded "in love". In other words, the love of Christ is the expression of our life in Him.

It is, as Paul says in ROM 5:5 "... God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

If He has poured out His love into our hearts then the implication is that love should be overflowing to those around us as He then continues to fill us as cups of love spilling out into this world.

This love is not some mere sentimental feeling, but is an eternal reality because the source of this love is the eternal Almighty God who is love and fills us with His life, which is love. This is why Paul continues to encourage us to get a proper perspective on this truth when he says, 'I pray that you "may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,..."'

Here Paul is basically saying, 'I want you to grasp that which is infinite.' How can any person begin to do this? Well, it's not as though Paul is saying, 'I want you to fully understand every aspect of the infinite God', which is what we're saying, since God is love and He is infinite. Rather Paul is saying, 'I want you to engage your mind and your will and your spirit to begin realizing what you possess.'

Simply because we don't fully understand something doesn't mean we can't appreciate what we have. If you and I had the opportunity to step on board the space ship Discovery and fly to the moon, we may not fully understand every detail of how that ship can get you there, but you can certainly appreciate and stand in awe of the power and the technology which is able to get you to the moon.

Paul is simply describing in human terms the awesomeness of our God when he uses the terms "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,..." The point he makes here is that this love is immense, but it is this love which we possess in Christ.

Do you have to fully understand the principles of the combustion engine to appreciate the power of a high performance dragster? Of course not. But if you put some effort into better understanding how it works your appreciation climbs in proportion to your understanding.

And so Paul is encouraging us, not to fully figure out our infinite God and His love, but to learn more of God and His love as we experience the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts and in the hearts of other believers, together with learning more of His redemptive love as He's revealed Himself in His word.

Make the effort to understand this relationship God has provided in Christ. Make the effort to grow in relation to your salvation. Make the effort to appreciate the love and the salvation we have in Christ.

Granted, even with our best efforts, we will never fully comprehend our God and His love, but not to make an effort to understand and appreciate what we can know is to short circuit the way in which we can be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.

To take the attitude that God is too awesome to be touched is to miss the intimacy we have with our Creator who personally indwells every child of God in Christ. Our objective in life is to know more and more of this love of Christ and grow in that love with the objective of being strengthened to be better servants of the Most High God. When Paul wrote to the Philippians he brings this out clearly.

PHI 1:9-11 "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God."

Here in Philippians Paul makes the connection between abounding in our love for Christ and growing more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. His point is that as we engage our minds and hearts in the word of God our love for Christ will grow. But, simply to fill our minds with knowledge will not necessarily accomplish that goal.

Knowledge is essential in learning more of our God, but there are many very knowledgeable people who are spiritual idiots. To approach the living word of God to gain knowledge only is to miss what the word of God is designed to do, and that is to establish a personal relationship with our God. And as with any relationship it is designed to grow.

If you could grow in your relationship with your spouse simply by digging up information from their past and cataloguing it, like one studying the life of Abraham Lincoln, how would that knowledge alone cause you to love them more?

It's when you take that knowledge and use that knowledge by applying it personally to that individual that knowledge becomes useful in a relationship aspect.

For example, with a little digging, you might learn that your spouse likes a particular flower, or a particular color. With this little bit of knowledge you might put together a special floral

arrangement to surprise her one day. Something that simple takes knowledge and allows it to transcend into a special act of love.

In the case of our God, simply learning information about Him does not necessarily translate into a relationship. It's taking that information and applying it to our lives that knowledge of God makes any sense or touches us and others personally.

When God reveals that we are all sinners, then we must personally accept that for our lives. When God says that the wages of that sin is death then we must personally acknowledge that is true of us. When God says that He came to die for sinners, that knowledge must be personally accepted and embraced before a relationship can ensue.

In the same way, if God reveals that our relationship with Christ will grow only as we seek Him and love Him and obey Him as we learn more of Him, then for that to be effective we must personally apply that knowledge as we submit to Him and obey Him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

At that point knowledge becomes reality and facts become relationship. This is why Paul continues.

EPH 3:18-19 [that you] "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."

How does love surpass knowledge? To the degree that knowledge alone does not create a relationship. It is personally engaging God by faith as we learn of Him through knowledge, that we taste and see that the Lord is good and begin to understand that His love is beyond anything we could ever imagine, or that we could adequately describe with the knowledge we have.

Paul is not saying that we throw knowledge out the window. It is essential in understanding our God, but knowledge is not the end. It's our wills saying yes to the One who has given us this knowledge of Himself and following our God and walking in that love by faith in the power of the Spirit as He provides the power.

What kind of knowledge are we talking about? A knowledge that includes, but is not limited to, our Creator choosing to create us for personal fellowship with Him forever in His kingdom; our Creator choosing a people for His own possession before the foundations of the world; a knowledge that includes the means by which He

does this for sinful people by sending His only begotten Son into this world by becoming man on our behalf to die and rise bodily to bring us to Himself on the last day as He resurrects us unto eternal life.

It's amazing what a little knowledge can do to help us appreciate what it is that our Almighty Creator has done for us as He loved us even unto death, death on a cross; a joy that He looked forward to as the Father sent Him into the world to gather His people.

And what happens then when we seek our God and draw close to Him as we love Him in response to the love He's given us in Christ? We are filled up to the fullness of God, as Paul says at the end of verse 19.

But what does it mean to be filled up to the fullness of God? The fullness of God is what we already possess in Christ. You can't be more full than to have the living God indwell you by faith in Christ. This is exactly what Paul told the Colossian Church.

COL 2:9-10 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

Unlike some groups who claim we are "little gods", just like Jesus, this passage and others like it tell us that we possess the life of Christ which is eternal in nature. In that sense we have been given the fullness "in" Christ.

But here Paul has been talking in terms of understanding this new life in Christ and then walking in its fullness and understanding that in this fullness we have access to the throne of God who is faithful to fill us and use us for His glory.

But we must understand that this filling is associated with walking in the truth and in the Spirit as we humble ourselves before our God by faith. Jesus makes mention of this in His sermon on the Mount in MAT 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Our filling is the life promised to us in Christ, but there is a continual filling from an experiential standpoint as we walk in this relationship by faith. Jesus spoke of this life in terms of being abundant.

Contrasting a life without Christ which is death, and real life by faith in Christ, Jesus says in Joh 10:10 "The thief comes only to

steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly."

There's the temptation to take this abundant life to mean only what an abundance of neat stuff we can get from God here and now. The abundant life is first and foremost a life which is, as Paul says, that which surpasses knowledge. It's beyond what our finite minds can fully comprehend, but it is a life of abundance where we can know this God who gives grace today and the eternal blessings that that entails.

Paul speaks of those blessings in 1TI 1:14 "The grace of our Lord was poured out on me *abundantly*, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

ROM 5:17 "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's *abundant* provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."

Whenever Paul speaks of the abundant life with Christ it's usually in the context of being able to be a servant of God by the grace of God. He never flaunts this abundant life in some selfish, or self-centered way, but rather He walks in this abundant life with the express purpose of giving glory to God with a life that seeks after Him and follows Him, no matter what, in the power of His Spirit.

And this is the way Paul ends this chapter.

EPH 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."

Our Almighty God is all powerful and we should never think that we serve an anemic God who can't strengthen us for works of service with the love of Christ being the motivating factor. In fact, as big and powerful as we can imagine our God being, we could never truly comprehend His true Power.

As Paul says, "to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." If we begin to comprehend this truth and then walk in this truth by faith, there is no reason for any believer to cower in unbelief, or to give up and sit on the sidelines, hoping the game ends soon and we can just all go home as Jesus comes back for us.

Paul is trying to give us an eternal perspective of our great God and the way His abundant grace is always there for us in all situations of life. This doesn't negate the real problems we all face. It simply should give us hope that God hasn't forgotten us or that He is unable to deal with our lives in a way that can still bring honor and glory to Him. But it won't happen unless we engage ourselves by faith in this relationship with God that we have in Christ.

And to the end that God is Almighty and working in and through us as He demonstrates His abundant grace we can say with Paul in EPH 3:21 "to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

God's glory is what matters. God's will in our lives is to bring glory to Christ. And He will move heaven and earth if necessary to work in our lives in such a way as to use us to bring glory to Him in this world and the next.

The reason He deserves all glory is that there is no one else who does. God is God. All things begin with Him and all things end with Him. And He desires for His glory to be seen in His church and in the One who purchased His church, Jesus Christ.

We have a great privilege to be the instruments through which God has chosen to exercise His glory. This does not mean that we have any glory in ourselves, but only to the degree that God is seen in us and working through us.

How much do we want God to use us to that end? May we be filled up to all the fullness of God as we seek Him and humble ourselves before Him in faith everyday of our lives, realizing that it is Christ who dwells in our hearts through faith. And it is His desire that we grow in this relationship as we begin 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.

To Him be all glory and to Him may we give every area of our lives to be used for His glory.

ROM 11:36 "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."