

“Seeking the Fulness of God”

March 10, 2013

Text: Ephesians 3:14-19

This week I was at the Shepherd’s Conference, which limited my time to prepare for this sermon.

So I went back to a sermon I preached in 1993, refreshed my own understanding of the text, & prepared to preach it this A.M.

The text is Eph 3:14-19, which is one of my favorites, & one I find I personally need to be reminded of periodically.

It has to do with spiritual strength versus spiritual weakness.

Spiritual excellence versus spiritual mediocrity.

Enjoying spiritual confidence/victory/joy as opposed to just getting-by and plodding-along, spiritually.

This text leads directly into Paul’s great doxology in Eph 3:20=>

“Now to Him who is able [has the power] to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, / to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.”

The unlimited power of God which can do unaskable, unthinkable, unimaginable things, is at work w/i us—the power of the H.S.

So by all rights, we should be strong not weak, spiritually excellent not mediocre, spiritual overcomers/victors not just plodders.

Eph 3:14-19 gives us a staircase of 4 steps by which we, as Xns, can become all that we can be, spiritually (if you’ll excuse my borrowing that army slogan).

The 4 steps Paul reveals in this text are these=>

- 1) Becoming strengthened in the inner man
- 2) X's dwelling in our hearts, by faith.
- 3) Knowing the love of God which surpasses understanding
- 4) Being filled with all the fulness of God.

Step 1—Becoming strengthened in the inner man

Paul begins this text on his knees, praying that God will strengthen the inner lives of the Ephesian Xns.

[Eph 3:14-16]=> *“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**;”*

In the spirit of these verses, we can pray (or even fast/pray) for God to strengthen us (& other Xns) in our inner man.

There are certain obvious things we can do ourselves that will help strengthen us spiritually—e.g. study God's Word, and obey what it tells us to do.

But ultimately, we, like Paul, rely totally on God's power working within us, to strengthen our inner man.

That means our quest for excellence must start w/ prayer.

But even before that, we must really desire to be strengthened.

You may have seen advertisements in which muscular men and perfectly proportioned women explain how they got that way, through the use of some exercise machine.

Whether/not they're telling the truth about the machine, it's clear that at some point they decided they really desired to look like that, & so they resolved to get themselves into better shape physically.

And that is equally necessary if we're going to get into better shape spiritually.

Paul's words are not for the complacent, who are content with spiritual weakness that results in spiritual defeat, guilt, feelings of hypocrisy, and the devastating fear that they aren't really even saved.

No, Paul's words are for people who realize that, because of the power of the Spirit w/i them, they can break out of spiritual weakness and enjoy all the blessings/benefits of spiritual strength, & thus please their Lord.

This text is for those who have the courage to embrace that hope in order to become strong in the inner man, by praying for spiritual strength.

If change like that is to take place w/i us, there's going to have to be some changes in our priorities that will result in lifestyle changes as well, & the way we spend our time.

And this is what we should be praying for God to bring about in our hearts: these changes in our values, attitudes, and priorities.

It will require a change in our relationship w/ God's Word,
submitting to its authority in our lives, and treasuring it up
in our hearts, that we might not sin against Him.

It will require a change of attitude towards the things of this
world, no longer loving them or even viewing them as
neutral, but hating them as enemies that weaken us & keep
us from becoming the kind of people we want to be.

It may well require a change in the people we spend time with.

But 1 thing is very clear=> Just as no one loses weight or builds
up muscle mass w/o changing his routine, no one slides
easily into spiritual strength w/o making some changes in
his life.

And because our will must be engaged in making these
changes, the key is prayer/supplication that God will
change our will and enable us to do so.

**Paul doesn't pray merely that God would give the Ephesians
more spiritual strength, but that He would strengthen
them according to the riches of God's own glory.**

He wants an abundance of the Lord's strength for them.

He's not looking for God to help them out a little, so they
can get over their spiritual doldrums or firm up a few
sagging muscles spiritually.

He's praying for God to turn them into Xns who are truly
strong in the Lord & in the power of His might;
People like Moses/Joshua/Daniel/Isaiah/Jeremiah.

Paul is praying that the Ephesians will become men/women of exemplary character, whose lives truly honor the Lord.

This means that if we're to become spiritual victors, not just plodders, we'll have to stop settling for second-best, spiritually.

We're going to have to become truly discontent with our lives, and w/ spiritual inferiority/mediocrity, rejecting out of hand any thought of compromise w/ the world or the flesh.

We're going to have to pursue a spiritual excellence that is beyond anything we've ever considered for ourselves before.

Step 2—Christ's dwelling in our hearts

This step cannot take place until step 1 has been accomplished, because the sins of a weak-hearted Xn will prevent it.

So really, step 1 is a step up, which places step 2 w/i our reach.

[Verse 17a]=> *“so that Christ may **dw**ell in your hearts through faith;”*

Someone: I thought X came into my heart when I was saved.

You're right, He did, if you believed in Him w/ saving faith.

In fact, Col 1:27 says that X in you is your hope of glory.

When a person becomes born again, the H.S. indwells him.

By virtue of the Spirit's dwelling w/i him, X dwells in him
as well, because X and the H.S. are one God.

The confusion in our text about X's dwelling in our hearts,
is resolved by our understanding the word " *dwell.* "
It means to settle down, making oneself at home.

**When we become strengthened in the inner man by faith,
X dwells and makes Himself at home in our hearts.**

The relationship we formed w/ Him when we were saved,
is now further-developed/strengthened/matured.

You prob. know a number of people in this church.

If you were to meet them in a store, you would greet them
and speak w/ them in a friendly manner.

But the people you know best, are the ones who actually
live w/ you, in your own house.

You interact w/ them every day.

You're on more familiar terms w/ them, than w/ anyone
else.

This is also what happens to your relationship w/ X, when He
dwells in your heart by faith.

Your communion w/ Him is constant, because you
constantly interact w/ Him in prayer.

When you wake up at night, you sense that He is still there
right beside you, ready to listen.

Someone: Isn't that true of every Xn?

No, weak Xns often feel estranged from X because of their unsuccessful struggles w/ the flesh & debilitating encounters w/ the world.

Whenever they fall into sin, their guilt leaves them w/ a sense of separation from Him, as if He weren't there at all.

At other times they simply feel indifferent towards the Lord because they're so caught up in the cares of the world trying to handle them on their own, w/o X's help.

This is why we must pray to become strong in the inner man, until X dwells/communes w/ us in our hearts, & we always have a sense of His being there, to help us.

May you/I have such an awareness of X's being w/ us.

May you sense His being there for you, so you can rest in Him, like a baby in its father's arms.

May we become so strong in the inner man and so obedient to God's Word, that we sense as never before His dwelling in us.

In his wonderful little book *My Heart, Christ's Home*,

Robert Munger explains it like this=>

“After Christ entered my heart, in the joy of that newfound relationship, I said to Him, ‘Lord, I want this heart of mine to be yours. I want you to *settle down* here and be fully at home. I want you to use it as your own. Let me show you around and point out some of the features of the home so that you may be more comfortable. I want you to enjoy our time.’ He was glad to come and seemed delighted to be

given a place in my ordinary little heart.”

But then Munger describes how he took X from room to room in his heart, & the changes that his doing so brought about.

* Certain books/magazines in the library room of his mind had to be taken out, so as not to offend his Savior.

* Certain things had to be eliminated from the dining room of his appetites/desires.

* In the living room, where he fellowshiped w/ guests, he made a commitment to meet/talk w/ the Lord often/faithfully.

* Changes like this were also made in every other room of Robert’s heart, as well.

This is a beautiful analogy of what must happen w/i our own hearts too, as Jesus comes to dwell there.

Every deep/intimate relationship changes us, and that is certainly true of our relationship w/ X, when He dwells in our hearts by faith.

But the prerequisite for such a relationship, is that we first become strong in our inner man.

Notice that Paul says X dwells in our hearts “by faith,” just as He entered them by faith.

1st, that means our faith in Him, our relationship w/ Him, and our sense of closeness to Him, will increase as He dwells there. Isn’t that exactly what we want/expect=> that our faith in our Lord would not only drive/motivate this process.

But that our faith itself would also increase, as the process continues?

Again, Step 2 is just another step up, enabling us to reach Step 3.

Step 3—Knowing God’s love which surpasses understanding

[Verses 17b-18]=> “*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,*”

When Jesus settles down in our hearts, our fellowship w/ Him becomes much richer/deeper, & more-meaningful to us.

As our closeness with Him grows, we begin to sense as never before His great love for us.

And as our fellowship w/ Him becomes closer/closer, our love for Him grows as well.

We love Him because He first loved us.

Paul shows us that this third step takes place in 3 stages.

1) The establishment stage—we become rooted/grounded and established in love, like an oak tree planted by a river.

This means we become doctrinally grounded, especially w/ regard to the truth of X’s love for us.

We are no longer “*carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men*” (Eph 4:14).

The tricky philosophies of the world, which sound so good, but are really bankrupt, both spiritually/intellectually, become exposed as the Satanic frauds they are, exposed by our understanding of biblical truth.

We can say w/ Peter, when Jesus asked if he planned to abandon his faith & leave X=> *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. / And we have believed”* Jn 6:68-69).

When we read Paul’s rhetorical question, *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* it rings so true, and we are so convinced in our hearts, that nothing can persuade us otherwise.

We become rooted/grounded in our faith in X’s love for us. It becomes firmly established in our minds, as an absolute/unwavering truth.

2) The comprehension stage—we come to truly comprehend the love of X for us, which His dwelling w/i our hearts makes all the more real/believable.

It’s not just that we gain a vague/general idea of X’s love, but we begin to take the measure of its dimensions.

As Paul says in verse 18 of our text=> *“[we become] able to comprehend with all the saints what is the **breadth and length and height and depth** [of that love].”*

* His love is so broad that He can love Gentiles a/w/a Jews.

* It’s so long, that we were chosen as the recipients of His special love before the world began (Eph 1:4-5).

* It’s so high, that He has seated us in the heavenly places with Him (Eph 2:6).

* It's so deep that it's capable of reaching all the way
down to the deepest depths of human depravity.

But then we must settle the truth in our own minds that, not
only is X's love eternal for people in general; His
love for me specifically is eternal, w/ neither
beginning/end.

He loved me before the world was founded, knowing
ahead of time everything I would ever say/do;
And He will love me still, when this creation has
been destroyed, & the earth has been burned
up, w/ intense heat.

We also become settled about the limitless nature of our
Savior's love, which not only died for sinful men,
but also died for sinful me.

* He truly bore the load of my sin on the cross.

* He truly stands before God, pleading for me.

* He has truly gone to prepare a place for me.

These are delightful truths to meditate on, enlarging our
comprehension of X's immeasurable love for us.

3) The acquaintance stage (which goes beyond mere knowledge).

Paul describes it like this (verse 19)=> *“to know the love of
Christ which surpasses knowledge.”*

We come to know/love Jesus, and His presence in our lives,
in a way that goes far beyond our reading about Him.

Paul was writing to people in Ephesus who had heard him teach about the love of X, &, intellectually, they understood it, and believed that what he'd taught them was true.

But Paul wanted them to come to a personal acquaintance w/ that truth—one that sensed X's loving interaction w/ them, in their lives.

When they were feeling discouraged, he wanted them to sense Jesus' loving encouragement through prayer/Scripture, and through X's providentially working in their lives, caring for them.

* He wanted them to sense X's lovingly chastening them when they needed his correction, & its resulting in the peaceful fruit of righteousness afterward.

He wanted them to become sensitized to X's involvement in their lives.

* He wanted them (out of His love for them) to experience X's giving them peace beyond comprehension when anxiety attacked.

Love like this is often best cultivated when a Xn is suffering, & really feels the need to experience X's love for him.

Paul himself wrote these words in a Roman prison w/ no other Xns around to comfort him.

- * In times like that, a sense of X's indwelling, and His love for us, can become an invaluable asset, the invaluable difference between sinking into despair, and maintaining a hopeful/optimistic/positive confidence that defies the world's expectations.
- * It can become the difference between depression & joy, spiritual defeat & spiritual stability/security.

A Xn lady named Marion wrote this just before she died of cancer=> "This trial has proven without a doubt that faith in the Lord only grows stronger in weakness. I long to see my Savior's face, and I praise Him that I can see and accept His love in all this. His presence has been so precious during this time."

When we enjoy that kind of rock-solid understanding/confidence in X's love for us, the final step in this staircase is w/i reach.

Step 4—Being filled with all the fulness of God

[Verse 19]=> "*and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be **filled up** to all the **fulness of God.***"

This is the top step, towards which we've been climbing.

To use that army phrase, this is being all that we can be as Xns.

It is becoming like X, to the extent that we as believers can be

like Him, because Col 2 says=> "*In Him all the **fulness** of Deity dwells in bodily form, / and in Him you have been made **complete** [a variation on the word "fulness"]*"
(2:9-10).

**There are 2 aspects of being filled w/ all God's fulness=>
an inward aspect, and an outward aspect.**

Inwardly, it is entering into the joy of X, who said (Jn 15:11)=>

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."

It's the abundance of life that X came to give us (Jn 10:10).

Jesus offers a level of joy/satisfaction/contentment of soul here, in this life, that cannot be found/attained in any other way.

When we live in the awareness of our Lord's presence and

in the assurance of His love, we gain the joy Peter was writing about when he said=> *"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with **joy inexpressible and full of glory**" (I Pet 1:8).*

Here we also find strength in our weakness, comfort in our distress, and guidance in our confusion/ignorance.

And here selfishness is banished, because when God's fullness fills us, there's no room left for self.

Outwardly, being filled w/ God's fullness produces X-likeness.

"Filling" in Scripture refers to domination/control.

* E.g. Acts 19:28 speaks of being *"filled with rage."*

That means being so angry that anger dominates & controls the way a person reacts.

* Acts 5:17 says the Jewish religious leaders were=>

"filled with jealousy"=> their feelings of jealousy overpowered them, making them irrational.

* In Eph 5:18, Paul tells us=> *“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be **filled** with the **Spirit**.”*

I.e., don't let intoxication control you, but rather be

“filled” w/ the H.S., so that He controls you.

Just as Jesus did, those who are filled w/ God's fulness, yield continually to the Spirit's leading in their lives, and He empowers them for service.

They can say w/ Paul (Gal 2:20)=> *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.”*

X Himself said=> *“I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me (Jn 6:38).*

You/I didn't come down from heaven, but we can/should do God's will, so that X can be seen in our lives.

In fact, that's the whole point of this 4-step progression from spiritual mediocrity to spiritual excellence.

** Eph 4=> *“...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the **fulness** of Christ” (4:13).*

When a Xn becomes *“filled up to all the fulness of God,”* he is filled with the Spirit.

When he is filled w/ the Spirit, he is spiritually empowered.

That was even true of Samson in the OT, who, being filled w/ H.S., tore a lion apart bare-handed (Judges 14:6).

In the NT, Acts 6 says that, when Stephen was filled with the Spirit, the Jews couldn't cope with the wisdom & power of his arguments (Acts 6:5, 10).

Jesus was anointed w/ the Spirit "*without measure,*" and He exercised spiritual power like no other man who has ever lived on this earth (Jn 3:34).

When God fills you/me, we will have the power to cope w/ temptations/trials/persecution.

We will also manifest the fruit of the Spirit=>

"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, / gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:23).

And we will minister to other people in the power of H.S.

Q: What is the alternative to being filled w/ all the fullness of God? => Emptiness (spiritual emptiness).

We all know what that's like, don't we?

We try to pray and we realize our prayers are empty

because we are empty, & there's no real prayer in us.

But it's a blessed thing to pray & worship God w/ a full heart.

We may pray w/ spiritual hunger/thirst, but they come from holy aspirations/desires, holy hope/anticipation from the H.S.

Our prayer may even be full of regrets/repentance as we confess our sins to Him, but it's a blessed fulness, because it's from God, for our good.

It's a fullness full of life/hope rather than despair,
full of power/strength, not weakness,
full of joy/confidence rather than bitterness/defeat.

If Jesus hasn't come to dwell in you, because you have never invited Him into your heart, none of this will mean anything to you.

I plead w/ you, ask Jesus to come into your heart as your Savior/Lord, and He will.

He said, "*Ask, and it shall be given to you*" (Mt 7:7).

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Text: Ephesians 3:14-19

1. Eph 3:14-19 has to do with spiritual strength versus spiritual weakness; spiritual excellence versus spiritual mediocrity; enjoying spiritual confidence, victory, and joy as opposed to just [18 plodding] along spiritually.

Eph 3:20

Eph 3:14-19 gives us a staircase of four steps by which we, as Christians, can become all that we can be spiritually...

Step 1—Becoming strengthened in the inner man

2. Paul begins this text on his knees, praying that [8 God] will strengthen the inner lives of the Ephesian Christians.

[Eph 3:14-16]

3. Paul’s words are for people who realize that, because of the power of the Spirit within them, they can break out of spiritual weakness and enjoy all the benefits of spiritual [18 strength].
4. This means that if we are to become spiritual victors, not plodders, we will have to stop settling for [14 second] best spiritually.

Step 2—Christ’s dwelling in our hearts

[Verse 17a]

Col 1:27

5. When we become strengthened in the inner man by faith, Christ [14 dwells] and makes Himself at home in our hearts.
6. This is why we must pray to become strong in the inner man until Christ dwells and communes with us in our hearts and we always have a sense of His [12 being] there to help us.
7. Paul says Christ dwells in our hearts “*by faith*”; our faith in Him and our sense of closeness to Him will [18 increase] as He dwells there.

Step 3—Knowing God’s love which surpasses understanding

[Verses 17b-18]

8. When Jesus settles down in our hearts, we begin to sense as never before His great [10 love] for us.

This third step takes place in three stages...

- *9. The establishment stage—we become doctrinally grounded, especially with regard to the truth of Christ’s [10 love] for us.

Eph 4:14; Jn 6:68-69

- *10. The comprehension stage—we come to truly comprehend the [10 love] of Christ for us.

Eph 1:4-5; 2:6

- *11. The acquaintance stage—we come to know and love Jesus in a way that goes far beyond our [16 reading] about Him.

Eph 3:19

Step 4—Being filled with all the fulness of God
[Verse 19]

12. This is becoming like Christ to the extent that we as believers [8 can] be like Him.

Col 2:9-10

There are two aspects of being filled with all God’s fulness...

- *13. Inwardly, it is entering into the [8 joy] of Christ.

Jn 15:11; 1Pet 1:8

- *14. Outwardly, being filled w/ God’s fullness produces Christ [18 likeness].

Acts 19:28; 5:17; Eph 5:18; Jn 6:38; Eph 4:13

15. When a Christian becomes “*filled up to all the fulness of God,*” he is filled with the Spirit; when he is filled with the Spirit, he is spiritually [22 empowered].

Judges 14:6; Acts 6:5, 10; Jn 3:34; Gal 5:23

16. It is a blessed thing to pray and worship God with a [10 full] heart.