



FILLED TO THE BRIM
EPH. 3:14–19

Open to Ephesians 3. Building up the body. This is a prayer for the church in Ephesus! Take us on a tour of the text. Ticket in high school. Knew officer Evans could get me out of it. I couldn't grant my request but I went to a guy who I believed was willing and able make it happen—which he did. Paul is about to make a big request something and he starts with a reminder that God is willing and able to grant his request.¹⁴ For this reason—the grace of God he's been talking about now for three chapters—I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named These opening lines reveal two fundamental convictions Paul has about who God is—what he's like. And I think Paul's two convictions about God here are essential for us if we're going to pray powerfully and joyfully and regularly. Our prayer lives won't even get off the ground without these two beliefs.

He is loving: Did he say love? Notice Paul's reference to God as Father here. This is important. He's addressing him like Jesus taught the disciples to, "Our Father." And the significance of this should be lost on us. J.I. Packer argues that justification is what we need most, but it's not the highest privilege of the Gospel, adoption is. "Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father...Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater." (J.I. Packer) God could have just saved us as citizens of the kingdom. He adopted us as children of the king himself. He's loving, and if you don't believe that you won't pray like Paul's praying here. But we need more than that.

He is powerful: Some debate about what "family in heaven" means here—from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named—some people say angels, some say Christians in heaven—but everyone agrees that in naming everything in the visible and the invisible world, he demonstrates his absolute authority. In the Ancient World, naming both requires and demonstrates authority. In Genesis, when God names the light "day" and darkness "night" and dry land "earth", he isn't just getting organized with His label maker. He's showing authority. In many ways, it's the same today. You name your pets. Children don't pick their own names, we name them. No doubt some parents abuse this. I'm sure some Bible characters wish they had a takeback—Gomer, Dorcas. Parents do it today—la-a. But they do have that authority! And in a much greater way, God exercises that kind of authority over every square in heaven and on earth and it's why Paul bows (they normally stand). It's a sign of the reverent awe humility that should characterize our hearts when we come to God. Make no mistake about it, on account of God's love, we can come boldly. On account of his power, we dare not come casually. With this in mind, I want to **Pray**. So, having reminded the Ephesians and us about the love and power of the God he voices his prayer for them in vs. 16-19.

16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—So he's asking that they might be strengthened with power—*dunamis*, where we get our word for dynamite. And it's important to realize that the source of this strength and power is the wealth or riches of God's glory. God's glory can mean a variety of things in Scripture. It can mean his brightness (radiance of His glory, Heb. 1:3). It can mean honor (Ascribe the Lord the *glory* due his name Ps. 29:2; to him be glory in the church cf. vs 21). But it can also refer to God's power. Rom. 6:4 says Jesus was raised to life by the glory of the Father. It's that life-imparting, death-defeating, transformative power in view here in this verse.

And Paul is asking that through the Spirit, God's power would overflow to us so that we can have the strength that we need. If you're just checking out Christianity, this is the place where we really part ways with our culture which says that we look to ourselves, and summon your inner strength. That we actually have what it takes to fix our brokenness and put ourselves back together. But it's not true. Our inner being isn't the source of our strength, it's precisely what Paul is asking God to strengthen! Our inner being is the liability. And for that reason, we don't look inside of ourselves to find strength—we look outside of ourselves. We don't live the Christian life on slogans like, "She believed she could, so she did," we "God knew she couldn't, so he did." The culture is about self-empowerment, the Gospel is about Spirit empowerment—Christ empowerment.

In fact, if you look at the language here Spirit in our inner being, and Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith are essentially equivalent statements, "To have Christ dwelling in us and to have the Spirit dwelling in us are the same thing. Indeed, it is precisely by the Spirit that Christ dwells in our hearts." (John Stott) This is especially important for children, "How does a human live in my heart?" Jesus is a human—he physically ascended. And our heart here isn't a reference to an organ but the whole person. In the Bible, the heart is the seat of our affections, intellect, and will. So, to say that Jesus lives in my heart, is to say that through the Holy Spirit and the faith he produces, Jesus is capturing my affections, molding my will, and my mind to see things as he sees them and love what he loves and hate what he hates.

But what's even more about Paul's prayer that Jesus dwell in their hearts is the question it forces us to ask—is he not already dwelling or living in their hearts? If you look back, Eph. says that these folks have been made alive in Christ (2:5) and raised with him (2:6). And if Christ already dwells in them, why is Paul praying that Christ would dwell in them? We would as the same thing about the Spirit. Well Ephesians 2 says the Spirit is dwelling in them. What can he mean in Eph. 5:18 when he tells them to be filled with the Spirit. And our answer here plays a massive role in our understanding of Christian growth and discipleship.

There is an objective sense in which we are indwelt the Spirit at conversion, but there is a subjective sense in which he still has yet to capture all of our affections and beliefs and actions. We're already children of God, but we are still living into all of the privileges that are ours in Christ. Rankin Wilbourne, "Become who you are." High ropes at camp. My shame and guilt were removed then—why did it take me 60 years to live like that? Leonard Ravenhill, "One of these days some simple soul will pick up the book of God, read it, and believe it. Then the rest of us will be embarrassed." The fight for personal holiness—is a lifelong journey of believing that God is who he says he is, and that we are who he says we are. It's a journey of subjectively becoming who we already are in Christ. That's what we need, and that's what Paul is praying for here. And we know that's what he's praying for, because that's what he describes in the second part of his prayer.

He starts by asking that we would be spirit empowered through faith, and then he gives a theological description of what that will look like. But before he does, he throws in this phrase 17b that you, being rooted and grounded in love, I understand that as God's love. As wonderful as it is, we're not rooted in love for one another, but in God's love for us. 1 Jn. 4:19 says we love because he first loved us. And it's that love in which we're grounded and rooted. Love this picture of a tree goes through seasons of beauty and blandness, storms and but come what may, because it's rooted in the earth, it's held fast. And if you and I root or ground ourselves on anything else but God and his love—if we root out lives in reputation, or children, or beauty, or wealth—our life will never be more stable than our current circumstances. Your life will be a constant earthquake because you rooted yourself in something that's always changing. The believer says, "If I lose all of those things, I'm still standing because I wasn't rooted in any of them—and if I lose my very life and get Christ, it's gain!"

And without this rootedness, not only will your life be unstable, but you can be sure that you will never experience the fullness of God's love that Paul's about to pray for in vs. 18. Building our lives on the sole foundation God's love is a pre-requisite for experiencing it. That's why Paul places this caveat right here. I talk to people who are hoping in—romance, achievement, other's praise—and they say they're not really experiencing God's love. Of course not. Why would we ever think that we would experience the fullness of the God's love, if we build our lives on or around other things? We shouldn't. **It's Mother's Day—identity not in being a Mother.** And it might be appropriate to pause and ask, are their areas where you are grounding your hope and joy for this life in anything other than God and his life? Have you diversified your foundation? Maybe you'd ask God to take back some ground in your heart. Maybe you need to resink your roots deep into the soil of the Gospel and the love of God.

Because it's only when you do, that you have any chance of experiencing v. 18 and in turn, that you **18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,** 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, My son has a song he listens to called God's love don't stop, if you have smaller children you've likely heard this one. And it says, "Taller than..." And I was studying, this week I was like, "Oh my goodness that song is a paraphrase of Eph. 3:18." It's trying to help my son learn about the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love. This is simply a way of saying that God's love—that Paul's been talking about for three chapters now—people is measureless, limitless, and altogether unfathomable. And it's way of trying to describe the love he's been talking about since chapter 1.

Chosen in him before the foundation the world (1:4) Predestined us for adoption as sons according the purpose of his will (1:5) lavished his grace on us in wisdom and insight (1:8) Gave us the Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (1:14) Being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. (2:5) Raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places (2:6). Saved by grace, not works (2:9) Prepared good works for us before so we might walk in them (2:10) Though we were far off and strangers to the covenants of the promises, brought us near through the blood of Christ (2:12-13) Dwelling place for God by the Spirit (2:22) Made fellow heirs of God's people and members of the body (3:6) Able to approach God with boldness and confidence (3:12). This is the love that surpasses knowledge. It seems completely counterintuitive, and explodes our categories for what love and mercy for sinners like us could really look like.

Dane Ortlund describes it this way, "That God is rich in mercy means that your regions of deepest shame and regret are not hotels through which divine mercy passes but homes in which divine mercy abides. It means the things about you that make you cringe most, make him hug hardest. It means his mercy is not calculating and cautious, like ours. It is unrestrained, flood-like, sweeping, magnanimous. It means our haunting shame is not a problem for him, but the very thing he loves most to work with. It means our sins do not cause his love to take a hit. Our sins cause his love to surge forward all the more. It means on that day when we stand before him, quietly, unhurriedly, we will weep with relief, shocked at how impoverished a view of his mercy-rich heart we had." Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*

God doesn't want us to have an impoverished view of his mercy-heart toward us. He has fully comprehended your sin, and in light of that invites you to fully comprehend his love. And we said earlier that you won't comprehend his love, if that love is not your sole foundation for your life. But Paul offers another criteria here. Did you see it? "**18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth**" Not only will we fail to comprehend God's love if that love it's our foundation, but if we try to comprehend it in isolation.

We simply won't have the strength to do it—it comes in community. “[We need] the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God, all the saints together, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, black and white, with all their varied backgrounds and experiences.” (Stott) People isolated not happy—only surprised that you're surprised. God has designed the community of faith to be a conduit through which the power to comprehend his love flows. That's why we gather, it's why we have small groups, it's why we do life together so we can walk side by side, hand in hand as we're increasingly filled with his mercy and lost in his love.....

And as a result, vs 19b that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Really a summary statement here of the entire prayer. And he repeats this idea that experience the fullness of God's love admits of degrees. Not that you have 1/10 of the Spirit now, but that the whole Spirit in you, over time as he masters you, will increasingly overflow into your life—will increasingly strengthen us to comprehend God's love so that we actually live into the privileges we already have as children. Summarize this entire prayer: Lamp illustration.

“Open for me the wondrous volumes of truth in his, ‘It is finished’. Increase my faith in the clear knowledge of atonement achieved, expiation completed, satisfaction made, guilt done away, my debt paid, my sins forgiven, my person redeemed, my soul saved, hell vanquished, heaven opened, eternity made mine. O Holy Spirit, deepen in me these saving lessons. Write them upon my heart, that my walk be sin-loathing, sin-fleeing, Christ-loving; And suffer no devil’s device to beguile or deceive me.” (*Valley of Vision*, O God The Holy Spirit)