

Series: Unsearchable Riches in Christ (Ephesians)

Text: Ephesians 3:17-19

Message #14 (November 19, 2006)

THE FULLNESS OF GOD

Introduction

1. Last week we began to look at the prayer of Paul for the Ephesians. We noted that it was a spiritual prayer concerned about the strength of the inner man. The prayer came out of the glorious explanation of the Gospel of Christ as it was directed to Jew and Gentile alike, bringing these diverse people into one body, one new entity for the glory and praise of God.
2. What the Ephesians needed was the power to grasp what God had done. How is it possible to understand, to get a handle on the glorious Gospel of Christ? We need power; we need strengthening in our inner being to get it.
3. Now, when we are strengthened in the inner man, some wonderful things happen – some amazing results occur. When we are plugged into this power, when the inner man is strong, Christ is able to dwell in our hearts and we are able to get a handle around the amazing love of Christ and we will be filled with the fullness of God! That is a mouthful! What does it all mean? Let's see if we can unpack what Paul has delivered.

I. THE CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS BY FAITH

A. When you are at home but not really at home (Unpacking – “to dwell”)

1. Illustrated by the word (There are a couple of words that mean “to dwell.” One word, “paroikeo”, means to dwell in a place as a stranger. The word katoikeo carries the idea of settling down and making a permanent residence, or, “to settle down and be at home.” That is the word Paul uses here). Remember that Paul is writing to professing believers at Ephesus. Christ already indwells them. This is question that must be asked, “Is He at home in our hearts?” It is one thing to dwell somewhere. It is quite another matter to settle down and be at home. Is He at home in our hearts, controlling us as our rightful owner?
2. Illustrated by allegory (From Macarthur – *In his booklet My Heart, Christ's Home, Robert Munger pictures the Christian life as a house, through which Jesus goes from room to room. In the library, which is the mind, Jesus finds trash and all sorts of*

worthless things, which he proceeds to throw out and replace with His Word. In the dining room of appetite He finds many sinful desires listed on a worldly menu. In the place of such things as prestige, materialism and lust He puts humility, meekness, love and all the other virtues for which believers are to hunger and thirst. He goes through the living room of fellowship, where he finds many worldly comparisons and activities, through the workshop, where only toys are being made, into the closet, where hidden sins are kept, and so on through the entire house. Only when He had cleaned every room, closet and corner of sin and foolishness could He settle down and be at home. Jesus enters the house of our hearts the moment He saves us, but He cannot live there in comfort and satisfaction until it is cleansed of sin and filled with His will. God is gracious beyond comprehension and infinitely patient. He continues to love those of His children who insist on spurning His will. But He cannot be happy or satisfied in such a heart. He cannot be fully at home until He is allowed to exercise His lordship over every aspect of our lives. We practice as well as receive His presence by faith.

3. Illustrated by life circumstances. (When we come home and find things undone or out of order, it is difficult to relax. Those unfinished things continue to stare at us. But when we have completed those things and we are finished for the day, we can sit down and really relax and enjoy where we are. Is Christ at home in our hearts, or are there some things that are out of order or some secret that ought not to be there. Is there some cleaning out of garbage that should be cared for?) It is not about His presence, but the quality of His residence that is in view here. Is it possible for Christ to settle down and be at home in my heart?

B. When you are at home and really at home

1. When the Holy Spirit controls us (the inner man is strengthened), Christ can be at home in our hearts. (See 1 Corinthians 6:15-17). Christ dwells in all believers, but apparently not comfortably so in all.
2. When He has complete control He is really at home. See John 14:23. The idea that the God, who made the universe, condescends to dwell in us, is a staggering concept! In what kind of a home is He dwelling? Perhaps it is time for some spring-cleaning!
3. How do I know if He is settled down and at home in my heart? I know this by faith. What I am required to do is to practice His presence by faith. Everywhere I go and everything I do must be with the realization that He is with me. I can never know the fullness of God, the incredible power of God until I am first strengthened in the inner man (controlled by the Spirit of God through the Word of God), thus allowing Christ

to settle down and be at home in me. That is why Paul was so concerned for the Ephesians to be plugged into the power source. That power is necessary for Christ to be at home in my heart.

II. THAT YOU MIGHT COMPREHEND THE LOVE OF CHRIST (This really is a prayer for power. I said earlier that Paul was making four requests. We could reduce that to two. He prays that we might have power in order that the inner man might be strengthened. When that happens, when the inner man is strong, Christ is able to dwell – to settle down and be at home – in our hearts. Now Paul prays that we might have the power to be able to grasp the love of Christ, which passes knowledge. If that happens, we will experience the fullness of God. How is all of this possible? It is possible because of the power at work in us. When we trusted Christ, we received a great power supply and God desires to release that power in our lives. So Paul prays that we might be able to comprehend the love of Christ. In the process of telling us that, he describes for us this love of Christ).

A. This love is available (“rooted and grounded”) Paul uses two pictures (mixed metaphors) to tell us about this love).

1. “Rooted” ... from the plant world – From what do I draw my nourishment and stability? If we are to have power in our Christian lives, we must go deep. If we are having trouble loving others, it may be because we are not established in love. And before we can be established in love, we need a pure heart. But before we can have a pure heart, we need to be able to resist temptation. And before we can resist temptation, we need a strong inner man. And in order to have a strong inner man, we need to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. If Christ controls my life, then His nature will dominate. And what is Christ’s nature? Love! And if Christ is in control, love will be springing up all over the place!
2. Grounded ... from the architectural world – Just like a building, we need a solid foundation. As someone has appropriately said, “You cannot go high unless you go deep.” But in Christ, as he settles down and becomes at home in us, we are rooted and grounded in love, so we are able go deep in His love and rise high in the glorious things of Christ! This love is available in Christ!

B. This love is receivable

1. The point here is that we should be made strong so that we can seize this love and make it our own. What kind of love is this? Consider these Scriptures: Mark 12:29-31 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...mind... and ... strength...you shall love your neighbor as yourself...” Romans 13:8-9 – “Owe no man anything, except to love each other...” Ephesians 5:2 “Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God...” Such love is selfless, sacrificing and given to service.
2. This is made available to all who are in Christ Jesus – that we might, with all the saints, know this love of Christ! (MacArthur, p. 109: *The absence of love is the presence of sin. The absence of love has nothing at all to do with what is happening to us, but everything to do with what is happening in us. Sin and love are enemies, because sin and God are enemies. They cannot coexist. Where one is, the other is not. The loveless life is the ungodly life; and the godly life is the serving, caring, tenderhearted, affectionate, self-giving, self-sacrificing life of Christ’s love working through the believer.* But if we are not strong in the inner man, that kind of love will be absent.

C. This love is incredible (James Boice told of the historical account of Napoleon's armies opening a prison that had been used during the Spanish Inquisition. They found the remains of a prisoner who had been incarcerated for his faith. The dungeon was underground. The body had long since decayed, but a chain attached to the anklebone bore testimony to the confinement. On the wall of the dismal cell was scratched a rough cross with four Spanish words surrounding the cross. Above was "height". Below was "depth". To the left was "width", and to the right was "length." Here was testimony to the surpassing greatness of the love of Christ even in the midst of suffering). Another prisoner, whose identity is unknown, wrote of God's love – a poem we sometimes sing – "Could we with ink the oceans 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 oceans dry, nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky."

1. The dimensions of this love

- a. Breadth – to the extremities of humanity (Jew-Gentile)
- b. Length – from eternity past to eternity future
- c. Depth – from the pit of sin to a seat in the heavenly places
- d. Height – raised to be seated with Christ (This kind of love goes wherever it is needed for as long as it is needed).

2. The character and capacity of this love – The Psalmist (73:25-26) wrote, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Each time Paul got close to expressing the love of God for him, he could hardly contain himself. In Galatians Paul wrote, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Peter had the same emotional response: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9). How does one measure love? Can I get \$10 worth or a half-acre of love? Paul begins with a metaphor and then a paradox.

He measures it and then exclaims that to know it is to surpass knowledge! Listen to what Jonathan Edwards wrote in his diary.

Once as I rode out into the woods for my health in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place as my manner had commonly been to walk for contemplation and prayer, suddenly had a view that for me was extraordinary of the glory of the Son of God, as mediator between God and man and his wonderful great, pure, sweet grace and love and his meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared was so calm and sweet it appeared so great above the heavens, the person of Christ appeared so enfeebly (to make weak) excellent with an excellence that was great enough to swallow up all thought and conception. And I continued in this state near as I can judge for about an hour that kept me a greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be full of Christ alone to love him with a whole and pure love and to trust in him, to live upon him, to serve and follow him to be made perfectly pure with a divine and heavenly purity.

I think that is what Paul was talking about! It was not merely a feeling or a sentiment.

It was not mysticism. It was the reality of a display of pure love attached to a hideous cross, erected outside the city of Jerusalem many years earlier, that was poured out for this blasphemous enemy of God, that he might be made to know the fullness of God!

The love Paul knew and was overwhelmed with, was the love of God found in the Gospel of Christ and that love had seized him and would not let him go – all the while calling him to know God more. In what may sound like a contradiction, Paul suggested that we can **know** the love of God which **surpasses understanding**.

Worldly love is based on attraction and only lasts as long as the attraction lasts.

Christ's love is based on His nature and thus lasts forever. May God strengthen us with power so that we might know the love of Christ so that ...

III. THAT YOU MIGHT BE FILLED UP WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD

A. The fullness of God is spiritual maturity – Certainly Paul has reached the top in terms of his desire for these believers to have the strength and capacity to know and comprehend the love of God – “to be filled to the measure of the fullness of God!”

1. Obviously, to be filled with all the fullness of God cannot mean that we become as God (divine). What Paul says here is similar to what Peter was saying in his second letter when he said that we might become partakers or participants with His divine nature. The issue was one of spiritual maturity, becoming like Christ.
2. God desires that my life take on the character qualities of who He is. He is holy;

therefore, my life should be marked by holy living. He is a God of love; therefore, my life should be marked with such love. Since God is love, when I am filled with the fullness of God, I express Godly love. Things change in my life as I become increasingly more Christ-like in my character.

3. We could say all that God is in His essential character, He desires that we demonstrate in our daily lives. Is that impossible? No! It is not impossible because He is at work in us with His power to bring it about. We could accurately paraphrase Paul's prayer this way, "that we as believers might be filled up to or unto all the fullness that is in God Himself." To be filled with the fullness of God means that we are emptied of self. Here Paul talks of the fullness of God. In 4:13, the fullness of Christ, and in 5:18, the fullness of the Holy Spirit. O that we might be filled with the fullness of God!

B. The fullness of God throughout eternity

1. Some would suggest that for us to possess the fullness of God would be like ocean water filling a seashell. That is not a bad picture, showing that we are filled to capacity with Him, but it may be short of what Paul is saying here.
2. I like what I read from Boice, "We are to be filled with all God's fullness, an infinite thing. But then, we have all eternity (an infinite time) to be so filled. I think Paul is praying that we will be filled and filled and filled and filled – and so on forever, as God out of his infinite resources increasingly pours himself out into those sinful but now redeemed creatures he has rescued through the work of Christ." How will God do this? I don't know. Paul may not have known either, but he was confident that God would do it! (Paul even concludes his prayer with the reminder that God is able to do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or think!)

Conclusion

1. Are you filled with fullness of God? Do you comprehend the love of Christ? Is He settled down and at home in your hearts? I hope so, but I suspect for many this is not the case. Are we willing to open up the closets and the recesses of our hearts, the dark corners that no one else sees, and allow the Lord to sweep it clean?
2. Are we willing to yield that secret, or those well developed bad habits, or that selfish inner nature to Christ? The dirt and the clutter and the inappropriate appetites must go.

We can never know the love of Christ or the fullness of God unless this is true. We will remain weak and sickly and defeated and discouraged. But there is a better way! (*The Valley of Vision*, pp. 44-45, “The Love of Jesus”) Will you pray with me?