

Filled with all the fullness of God

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[0 : 0 0] Let us now turn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 3. Reading at verse 14, For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is nipped, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power, through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Well, in these past months I have been reflecting with you on this marvelous prayer offered by the Apostle Paul.

Already we have seen how he prayed, what he prayed for, and especially praying for strengthening in the inner man.

Then we saw how he was desirous of a permanent resident in the life of the believer. We noted the role of the Holy Spirit in this, and the purpose of His residency, that you be rooted and grounded in love, because God has called us to live among and to love sinners.

And He knows that in order for us to love one another, you will need to have a life that has been established and anchored in the love of God.

[2 : 0 5] And then the last time I was with you, we looked at the dimensions of love. Although when you read the prayer in these verses, it does not specifically state that these dimensions refer to love.

that you have been rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.

It does not say what it is the breadth and length and height and depth of. And yet we understand it from the context that it refers to the dimensions of love.

Because given the context, it is difficult to see what else these dimensions may refer to. We noted the marvelous breadth of love, and I noted some examples from the Bible who were welcomed into the embrace of love.

I didn't mention the more high-profile people whom you might mention from the Bible, but those who might be considered of a lower profile.

[3 : 3 5] There was a place for Rahab, the prostitute, for backslidden, penitent, restored Samson. A place for Naomi, who experienced being emptied in order to be even more filled.

A place for Ruth, the Moabite, who came out of a land of idolatry to become an heir of the promises. A place for the woman that was a sinner.

Her sins are many, are forgiven, and we are told she loved much. Love was not the cause of her forgiveness, but the consequence of her forgiveness.

Her love was the proof that she had received forgiveness. And the love is a sign of forgiveness.

All true love is preceded by a sense of sin and an assurance of pardon. I mentioned Zacchaeus, the corrupt, hated tax collector who became rich at the expense of the poverty of his fellow citizens.

[4 : 50] And we could go on, but the point that I was trying to make was this, that this love is so wide that there is a place for the likes of you and me.

We may have no high profile in the Christian life. We may even think that we should not be in the same room as the saints of God.

But this is the truth. Christ loved you too. And however you feel about yourself and however you might view yourself this evening, however you might consider that you don't belong in the room with the saints of God, Christ loved you.

And if Christ loved you, then most certainly you too shall be in the room with the saints of God. You shall occupy the home or the house of many rooms.

And there is a place for each one. However lowly you might see yourself this evening. And then we spoke of the length of this love and referred to it specifically to the eternal nature of love without beginning and without end.

[6 : 17] And then I mentioned the depth of the love and I said if I remember correctly that to measure the depth of love you began at the throne and measure downwards.

After the service, when I was here last time, one of the brethren said to me, I have a measurement, he said, with regard to the depth that you did not mention.

You did not say, he said, that the depth of his love took him into hell. Now I like that people come up to me to speak about the sermon and the lecture.

Often they may have heard something or have much better insight than I myself have into the portion of scripture for reflection.

And that is a help for me to hear what others are thinking or what they have heard. But when I got home, I looked at my notes to see what I had in my notes.

[7 : 28] And this is what I found in my notes. The depth of his love leads him into the place where he experiences what is at the very heart of the curse, death, abandonment, leading to the cry of dereliction, my God, my God, why?

Now it's possible that I did not mention this as I think the clock at that particular time was beginning to catch my eye. Where could he experience abandonment?

But in the place of eternal punishment. There could not be abandonment undecorated truly in the soul of the God-man except in the place of eternal punishment.

And I quoted to my brother that night what the theologians used to say. He suffered hell-intensively but not extensively.

But not extensively. And then the height of this love it rises up into heaven raising sinners to dwell with him in heavenly places with every spiritual blessing.

[8 : 53] And so the apostle the apostle tells us of the love that surpasses knowledge. And what I understand from that love that surpasses knowledge is to say that it is so great that no one can know this love fully or perfectly.

we can never plumb the depths of the great ocean of love. No matter how much we experience and know of the love of Christ no matter how fully we enter into his love for us there is always more to know and to experience.

Does that not fill you with joy? There is always more to know and to experience. Irrespective of how much you have known and experience there is always still more.

And so you come to the culmination of the prayer and this request that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

And I think I said last time that this is a desire for true spiritual maturity.

[10 : 23] It's a feature of the New Testament writers that they have this aspiration for those to whom they write.

Not just Paul but also the author of the letter to the Hebrews. Remember the writer of that letter was complaining that long after they should have been eating meat his readers were still drinking milk like spiritual infants.

Therefore let us leave he says the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. And so you have this request made by the apostle that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

And just repeat the phrase to yourself. You sort of get a hold of it. All the fullness of God.

For Paul this is spiritual maturity but what does it mean? Well it might be easier to say what it does not mean.

[11 : 43] It does not mean that those for whom this is true that they become divine beings. In other words that they become gods.

That is an impossibility. There is and there always will be a vast gap between the creator and creation between God and man.

True God became incarnate. Shorter catechism keeps you right. How did Christ being the son of God become man? And you remember the response of the reformers Christ the son of God became man by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul being conceived of the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born of her yet without sin.

God became incarnate but man never becomes God. And you remember that was the temptation that was dangled before our first parents in the garden.

That they would become like God if they were to eat of the fruit of the tree that was forbidden of them they would become like God and they succumbed to the temptation only to discover that they were very far from God.

[13 : 13] That they were not only far from God but they discovered that they had rejected God and rejected the conditions of the remaining in the state of innocence.

Well man never becomes God not even in the eternal realm. The fullness of God what are we to understand from it?

We don't become God. Theologians speak of the attributes of God the characteristics that set before us what God is like and the attributes are divided into two categories.

The first is God's incommunicable attributes. attributes those attributes that are inseparable from deity and which cannot be imparted to finite creatures.

Among this group you find the immutability of God if you like the unchangeableness of God's nature. His infinity his omnipotence his omnipresence his omniscience.

[14 : 25] attributes so when Paul speaks of being filled with all the fullness of God he cannot mean that we receive attributes that belong exclusively to God.

But what about his communicable attributes? I think it is evident from the Bible that he does give these to his people.

God is holy and the believer is also called to be holy. You shall be holy for I am holy says God.

The same could be said of God's goodness his love his mercy his faithfulness and more what Paul in writing to the Galatians calls the fruit of the spirit love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness self control what can we deduce from that well could I suggest that being filled with all the fullness of God involves becoming like God in our character remember how Paul expressed it in writing to the Romans and stating that the goal of salvation is to be conformed to the image of a son in other words to become Christ like in our nature in our in our conduct in the way that we live Christian maturity is Christ like godliness now you you can compare that with other statements that are made by the apostle in this very letter we are to grow he says up in every way into him who is the head into

Christ further on in that same chapter chapter 4 to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness so to become more mature is related to bible knowledge but it is not exclusive bible knowledge we can have bible knowledge without being spiritually mature we can have spiritual experiences without this maturity i come back to this spiritual maturity is christ likeness reflecting christ through the frailty of our beings remember that all through this prayer paul is asking god to deal with our inner being that he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being verse 17 that christ may dwell in your hearts through faith so when he says being filled with all the fullness of god the ideas of the triune god living and serving within us what is our inner being the mind the emotions the will to be filled with all the fullness of god does this not involve our minds our emotions and our wills yielding to the sovereign will of god surely this means to yield our minds to the teaching of the word of god if you look at the pattern of this letter to the

[18:03] Ephesians you can see that Paul first of all sets about giving doctrinal instruction then he prays for Christ's love to mold their emotions in this prayer and then in chapter 4 he exhorts them to exercise their will in obedience to god the mind the emotions and the will is the Pauline order it begins with the mind Paul to the Romans do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind the same priority is seen in the ministry of Christ remember when many were seeking him because of his marvelous miraculous healing powers he moved away he rose early for a time of solitude a time of prayer and when the disciples found him they told him everyone was looking for him remember where he put the emphasis and he said to them let us go to the next towns that

I may preach there also for that is why I came out he didn't come particularly to provide physical healing he came to provide spiritual healing he came to engage the mind and the will and the hearts of those there there is no such thing as a free mind apart from being in

Christ and when you are in Christ your mind is controlled by him well our minds are ruled either by error or truth by darkness or by light by the devil or by God by sin or by righteousness because we have been blinded and kept from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ we require the light from on high to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ so if we wish to be filled with all the fullness of God it is necessary absolutely necessary that we have God's word rolling our thinking so that this becomes true let God be true though everyone were a liar in other words that we put the weighting and the emphasis on the word of

God even when it cuts across what we ourselves may wish or desire God's word comes first and God's word is always truth doesn't matter what we might think when we have a mind that is submissive and soaked in the truth then this will also be true for us he thinks within himself so he is doesn't matter what our social status might be doesn't matter whether we educated or uneducated require to submit to the word of God it begins with the mind but it doesn't end there we are to be filled with the fullness of God our emotions must be yielded to be formed and molded by God now it may be true when we are young converts that our emotions are very preeminent in the way that we conduct ourselves and there's always the danger of letting our emotions run away with us one of my favorite parts

Dr. McDonald there's an English translation of his Gaelic part ever thought he as his word was living feelings fresh and good but that he should live on feelings they could never serve as food you cannot let your emotions be the source of your fruit yet when faith had fresh enjoyment then the flesh was stricken soul sense and feelings had abundance and the cup was running over you see the two go hand in hand they go together without the other well Paul wants us to comprehend the love of Christ and comprehending Christ's love seems to me to go beyond the mind beyond the thinking of the heart and it penetrates right into the feelings of the heart his love is the power that shapes our emotions and you remember the very vivid example that

[24 : 40] Paul himself received of this prior to his conversion he was present when a man was being stoned to death the man's name was Stephen his crime preaching the gospel and do you remember the picture that is given to us in the Bible of this man falling to his knees cried out with a loud voice Lord do not hold this sin against them there he is on the very brink of eternity being stoned by those who were so violently opposed to the teaching of truth the love and compassion of Christ so evident in the dying plea of this man who is just on the brink of entering into the eternal realm with

Christ well how we need our emotions to be molded by the love of Christ the transforming power of love just a week or two back I was speaking to a lady about her brother in law whom I had met this man's wife died probably five six years ago and I said to the lady well how well he looked and how I thought you know because he had certain issues that left him looking decidedly silly but he seemed to have got over his problems and he was looking really good and the lady smiled and she said to me he's got a lady friend and the conclusion I drew was this there was a new love in the life of this man and the new love well as she hinted seemed to be responsible for the way that he looked and

I thought well here's an illustration for the spiritual realm you see it should be the same in the spiritual realm the expulsive power of a new affection coming into the life of a man or a woman or a boy and a girl ought to be seen in their lives inwardly and outwardly as they conduct themselves and so Christ exhorts Paul exhorts rather in this letter walk in love as Christ loved us and that means getting on your love shoes have you tried them out recently getting them on and going out in the love of the Savior well it's not just our mind and our emotions but we need our wills to be ruled by

God just as true knowledge must be confirmed by love true love is confirmed by godly choices if you love me says Jesus you will obey my commandments if we have Christ's love for others that love will express itself in Christ like actions that flow from an obedient will the reigning of Christ within must involve an increasing obedience to God's will that is why I believe one of the reasons Christ taught his disciples to pray and he began like this our father in heaven hallowed be your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven for those whose mind and emotions are ruled by God the first concern is God's glory God's kingdom and

God's will and that is part of what I at least understand to mean to be filled with all the fullness of God I'm going to close with this because there is another duty this evening with words from Frances Ridley Havergal and I think she has summed up what it means to be filled with all the fullness of God she wrote like this take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee and then she says take my intellect and use every power as thou shall choose take my will and make it thine it shall no longer be mine take my heart it is thy know it shall be thy royal throne to be filled with all the fullness of

[30 : 08] God oh how wonderful is God's plan for poor sinners like you and me that God fills you in this in this marvelous way so that although you may feel that you're falling so far far short every day that you open your eyes but in order that Christ may shine and be reflected through the frailty of your sinful life let us pray all