

Ephesians 3:19-21, Part 1

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All of the benefits of knowing him, all of the benefits of being his child, this is what Paul is praying for that would come to us in a way that transforms us.

So here in verse 19, Paul is going to finish up this fourth and final request the ultimate request that he lifts up. And as we've been talking about through these first three requests, all of these are prayed to be according to the glory of his riches. So God is not being asked here by Paul to bless out of his the riches of his glory, but instead, according to.

So the depth of the blessing that Paul is seeking, we talked about this some Sundays ago, just this, according to the riches of his glory. We'll see that again in the doxology this morning.

But then, these requests, we took a look at the structure of the grammatical structure that Paul's using, and he's using this structure, and this language that says was very plainly that the translation 'so that' is very accurate, and very faithful, because these requests are built one upon another. So that Paul asked for request A, so that God may do B, so that he may do C, so that he may do D.

So each one rests upon the previous one, we can't even look at them out of order, because they're sort of stacked like that, that Paul's asking, I asked first for this, and then this and then, in granting that I asked for this. Now the first one that he asked for was this strengthening in their inner being with power through the Spirit. And so we took a look at how it is that the Spirit of God strengthens the believer. And we saw that God strengthens the believer in all kinds of ways; through His Word, through obedience to His Word, through the communion of the saints, lots of ways that God strengthens us. But the primary and the central and the most powerful way that God strengthens us, is by removing from us our sources of self-strength, by causing us to look to Christ to look to the spirit in reliance upon him, because in our weakness, he is strong. He is not strong in our strength, we are weak, and he is strong. As we look to the words of Paul to the Corinthian believers.

And so by weakening us by lovingly and carefully and gently with great grace, taking from us those things that are spiritual or emotional crutches and causing us to look away from the idols of our life and look to Christ in faith alone, by that we are strengthened, we are not made stronger ourselves, but we are made in and of ourselves weaker, and by that we are strengthened.

And then being strengthened in such a way, then we looked at the second request, Paul then says upon that, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And we looked at that, and we saw that the language the words that Paul is using there is literally to reach out and seize upon. In other words, Paul is not asking that Christ would indwell their hearts in a conversion sort of way. But instead, Christ is already in their hearts. And Paul is praying that Christ would really settle down and dwell intimately. He's praying for a greater fellowship, a greater communion, a real settling-down in their hearts.

And then that being done, the next request that we looked at last week was so that they may have this supernatural comprehension. That they may comprehend the incomprehensible, which is to say, the, the height and the depth and the breadth and the width—in different order there—of the love of Christ for His people. This love of Christ, that we would know this with an experiential kind of knowing this, this love that surpasses the ability to know it by experience. So that we would truly really have this great grasp of the love of Christ for His people.

And we looked last week at how it is that the Bible teaches us to think of God's love for us—not primarily in emotional ways that God has this great reservoir of emotional affection for us which he does. But instead, the Scriptures teach us to think of the measure of God's love for us as the cross. The cross is how the Scriptures teach us to think of the measure of God's love for us. And so the more that we comprehend what Christ became for us on the cross, the more we comprehend his love for us, because that is the measure of His love.

And so then that leads us today into the fourth and final request, the ultimate request, as we'll see in just a little bit, there's another we'll talk about that as we go. But this fourth request of the prayer the lifts up is 'so that you may be filled with all the fullness of Christ.'

So this being filled with the fullness of Christ, as we look at these words, filled, fullness, they're related in English, same thing in Greek, they're both the same word in different forms, filling, and fullness, and they mean just what it sounds like they mean.

Filling means a supplying—to capacity and beyond capacity. Fullness just means having been supplied and filled to overflowing to, to a great capacity of fullness there. So they mean, what just what they mean on the surface there. So this being filled with the fullness of Christ is what we're gonna wrestle with, at least for the first part of our time together this morning. What does Paul mean? What is he asking that God would do when he asked that you may be filled with the fullness of Christ.

So the first thing that comes to my mind is what Paul said at the end of chapter one, when he said, he called us as the church, the fullness of Christ here on Earth.

Verse 22, of chapter one, and he put all things under his feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is the his body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

And so if you'll think way, way back to when we were in chapter one, when we looked at that verse there at the end of chapter one, if you recall, we talked about how that is really a truth that is beyond our full understanding. All of Scripture is beyond our complete understanding. We know this, but this verse in particular, this—we as the church are the fullness of Christ, who fills all in all. And we talked about how we can understand some things about that. But there is a great amount of truth in that verse that we just, we sense, our spirits sense that there's more there that's beyond us.

Now, as we come to this same phrase, of course, we can't help but to be reminded of what Paul says earlier about—that we as the church are the fullness of Christ. Now he prays that we may be filled to the fullness of Christ.

So this, out of the gate, reminds me of a truth that the scriptures will bring to us repetitively, specifically, in the New Testament. The New Testament teaches us of this reality of our salvation that we, for lack of a better term, we call it the “already, but not yet.” So our scriptures are full of this kind of thing. In Christ, we already are something yet, we are not yet something. All right, and we can fill that those two blanks in with a lot of things.

We can fill those blanks in with, for example, new creations in Christ—for, Second Corinthians 5:17—we are new creations. Yet, as Paul is going to say in chapter four, he's going to say, put on the new creation, put off the old man, and put on the new man. So we are a new man, we are—we're not thinking male, we're thinking humanity—we are a new humanity. Yet we are to put on a new humanity.

Or we think about righteousness. For example, Paul will say to the Romans, in Romans five and verse one, that—since we have been justified by faith—now in that context, been justified is a synonym for having been made righteous. We are righteous, we have been made righteous in Christ, Christ covers us. His righteousness is what the Father recognizes when he looks at us. Yet, the scriptures go on to tell us to—strive for righteousness, to pursue righteousness, as Paul says to Timothy, (I'm sorry), Second Timothy two, verse 22, to pursue this righteousness, that we elsewhere are told we already are.

And we see this in other concepts as well. We see this for example, we wrestled with this back in chapter one. When Paul prays the first prayer for the Ephesians, he prays that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened, that the spirit of wisdom and revelation would be particularly powerful and active in them. And he had just a few verses earlier verified that they are indwelt by the Spirit, so they're indwelt by the Spirit, yet Paul prays that the spirit would—indwell or work or be active.

A similar thing here we just dealt with just to just, I think, last Sunday, this this or no—two Sundays ago, this indwelling of Christ, we are in dwelt of Christ, yet Paul prays that this indwelling of Christ would be richer and fuller, and more complete.

So we see this concept all over the place, that we in Christ, we are something, yet at the same time, we are encouraged to strive for something. And in processing all that we know that that has to do with the reality of our salvation—that we have been covered with the righteousness of another, meaning Christ, yet at the same time, we are not fully righteous in our own life. We can all look in the mirror of our life and see that we are not fully righteous, yet, in a real true sense, we are in the eyes of the Father.

And so from that springs, all kinds of other truths like this, and this is one of those, this this truth here that we are as the church the fullness of Christ who fills all in all. Yet at the same time, Paul prays that they will be filled with the fullness of Christ.

So we're back to the same question. What does Paul mean by filled with the fullness of God?

This is an expression of which evangelical scholars, biblical scholars don't have a whole lot of agreement. Some will take this phrase to be—Paul is praying for a particular spiritual experience, an ecstatic sort of experience, a heightened experience. If you've ever read, maybe missionary biographies or biographies of Christians in the past, and you've read, oftentimes of these types of profound experiences, lots of times, a believer might have one of these, I think of maybe John Flavel, or Charles Wesley, or names like that people that just had this incredible ecstatic experience, in which—DL Moody is another—in which they just have this encounter with God and they are consumed, they are pressed in their spirit with this great profound realization of the love of God for them.

Now, I don't doubt those. And I think that there is a sense in which this does concur with what Paul's asking. But I don't think that that is the real nature of what Paul is praying for here. I don't think that he's praying that we might have an experience, that the Ephesian believers would have this greater experience in the sense that you are praying tonight by your bed, and you're just overwhelmed with a sense of the presence of God. If God chooses to do that in your life, then we're all for that. But I don't think that that's the root of what Paul's praying for.

Others will take this and they will, they will think that what Paul is praying for here is just a filling of what we're told that the fullness of Christ is. So this fullness of Christ is something that shows up in many places in the New Testament. For example, John chapter one, we're told that in the fullness, in this fullness, we've received grace upon grace, or, for example, later in the Letter to the Ephesians, in chapter four, Paul is going to say that to the church have been given apostles and prophets and teachers and preachers, for the purpose of building up the church to the fullness of the stature of manhood in Christ. So in that sense, the fullness of Christ is equated with this maturity in Christ, we're being made mature in Christ, being equipped to do the work of the church.

Or elsewhere, we see the fullness of Christ show up in Paul's letter, for example, to the Colossians chapter two and verse nine, in which we're told that Christ is the fullness of God dwelling bodily. In Christ, the fullness of what it means to be God dwelt, bodily. And so some will take this prayer for the fullness of Christ, the filling of the fullness of Christ, to be a prayer for just that—Christ is the fullness of God, we have Christ, and so therefore, Paul is praying for the fullness of God.

I don't think that that particularly fits either. So what fits the request that Paul has just made? Because remember, this is the fourth one. And the fourth request, whenever there's a sequence like this, that builds upon itself, then which of those four requests is going to be most important? Not trick—yeah the last one. Obviously, you're building up to the last one, obviously, the last one is where you want to get to.

So the flow of Paul's prayer, what would it lead us to think that Paul has in his mind when he talks about being filled with the fullness of Christ, and I think that to see that all we have to do is just look to the previous phrase, where he says—that you might comprehend the height and the breadth and the width. And again, it's a different order, but that you might comprehend this breadth and width and height, this immensity of the love of Christ.

So as I plugged that in, and I think about this is what that was all leading to the strengthening in the inner man, through the mainly the removing the careful and gracious, removing of those things that compete with Christ for our loyalties, to the deeper, fuller, richer fellowship with Christ, which then opens the door to a comprehension of His love, an experiencing of His love, to the end result that we are filled with the fullness of Christ. I think that the only place that we can land and, and we can probably phrase this a number of different ways, but the fullness of Christ is all that God has for us in Christ. All of the blessings and privileges that are ours in Christ Jesus, I think that is the fullness of Christ that Paul has built up to this crescendo to pray for, that you be filled with all of the blessings and privileges that are ours in Christ Jesus.

So when we think about this, this not only fits the immediate context, not only fits the prayer, but it also fits the entire letter. Because everything from chapter one verse three has been all about that, has been all about our blessings and privileges in Christ. We've talked about this, a multitude of times, particularly through chapter one, because Chapter One is all about our blessings and privileges in Christ; our blessings, prior to creation, prior to the foundation of the world are our choosing, our adopting.

Our blessings in Christ that are brought to us in time by the son, his forgiveness, his redemption that he purchases on the cross, the blessings and privileges that were brought to us, as we believed—when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire. And then not only these blessings that we have acquired here in time, but also the blessings and privileges that await us, after the conclusion of this era, of this time when our real life begins. Remember all those Sundays that we talked about the blessed hope, the inheritance that is laid up for us.

And then we have this prayer at the end of chapter one, that we might understand these things, that you might understand and perceive your blessings and privileges in Christ. Then chapter two is all about what Christ delivered you from, in order to bestow those blessings and privileges upon you—you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked in complete accordance with this world, with a god of this age, in complete accordance with the culture of this age, yet, by grace, you had been saved, this wasn't your own doing this was the gift of God.

So all of chapter two was about how we were utterly undeserving of this, how deep how low, the Lord had to reach in order to bestow upon us the blessings and privileges in Christ. And then chapter three is all about the church. The church, which is the context, the sphere, in which all these blessings and privileges come to us.

So this prayer really is, as we said a few Sundays ago, this really is the culmination of all of the first three chapters, with the exception of just those very two initial introductory verses, verses one and two, Paul an apostle of God in Christ Jesus to the saints who are in Ephesus and our faithful in Christ Jesus. Other than that, beginning at that point, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And I'm going to talk for three chapters about those spiritual blessings. And then when I get done talking about those spiritual blessings, I'm going to pray that you be filled with the fullness of those spiritual blessings that are yours in Christ Jesus.

So these blessings and privileges, this reality that's ours in Christ, that comes to us by way of the love of Christ for His people, the fullness of what God has for us all, all of the benefits of knowing him, all of the benefits of being his child, all of the benefits of being the heir to his kingdom—this fullness of God, this is what Paul is praying for, that would come to us in a way that transforms us. Because this is how the Scriptures teach us that we are transformed again, at the risk of repeating ourselves, but we repeat ourselves because Paul is repeating himself. We are transformed not by reaching down and finding more willpower, we are transformed not by training ourselves to say no to certain sins. We're transformed by beholding Him, by perceiving His great love for us. That is how the Christian is transformed in reality.

We are righteous before God. But we are in this process of becoming righteous, and we are becoming righteous, not because we are people of greater willpower than non-Christians, but we're becoming righteous in our life because we are increasingly beholding Him, perceiving him, and seeing him.

This is straight from the teaching of the New Testament, for example, Second Corinthians three, verse 17, and 18. Now the Lord is the Spirit—so here's the work of the Spirit—and we all with unveiled face are beholding the glory of God, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

So you see there plainly the transformation is coming to us as we behold, and behold, there doesn't mean with physical eyes, it means beholding with the eyes of the heart. The eyes of the spirit, of spiritual beholding. We are made alive to God, and we are made increasingly alive to God so that we may increasingly behold Him, and increasingly be He changed.

First John chapter three and verse two—But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. So let's pause right here. And let's just review one more time back through the steps of the four requests. Number one, Paul prays that you'd be strengthened with power through the Spirit in your inner man in your inner being. God is not content to allow us to continue to rely on the false means of self-support, that we are under the illusion really exist in our life. Reliance upon self is an illusion, and the world and our enemy want us to believe the illusion that we can rely on ourselves. Our Father knows we can't. Our Father knows he is the only rock, he is the only fortress, he is the only sure foothold. And so he's not content with having his children to rely upon that which is false upon the sands which shift and sink away. He will not rest until his children are firmly planted on the foothold on the stronghold of him and him alone.

And so, he first prays that you be strengthened in your inner man, that you may rely more fully, not upon yourself, you may forsake yourself and turn to Him and Him alone and relying upon him, in your weakness, he is made strong in you.

Which leads to then the second request that Christ would really find deep communion and fellowship with you. God is not happy with partial fellowship. God is not happy with false fellowship. God's not happy with fake fellowship with His children. God is not happy, having a part of you. God wants all of you, he wants genuine fellowship, he wants a genuine communion. Why? Because he's the selfish God no—because He created you to find ultimate pleasure in his friendship. And he knows, having made you, having made your soul, that you will never

find ultimate contentment and any other fellowship other than full fellowship with Him. And so he won't rest until you have that full fellowship with Him.

Which then leads to this greater comprehension of his love for his people. We can't comprehend his love for his people outside of fellowship with him outside of communion with Him, outside of the weakening of the outer man, and the strengthening of the inner man, that increasingly perceives him as our rock, which opens the door wider and wider to sweeter fellowship, showing us more and more the deep love of Christ for His people, which is, Paul says, being filled with the fullness of Christ.

So this is the final request that Paul has built up to, this request that, in a sense is what is praying in Romans eight, verse 15, that by the Spirit, we truly cry out in our hearts—Abba, Father. You are our father, you are our rock, you are everything. In your hand, you hold the key to all of my life's satisfaction, all of my life's joy. Apart from you, there is no true joy.

And so this is ultimately the fullness that I believe that Paul is praying for, the fullness of God, all that God is for us through the love of Christ, God's gift of himself in all the ways that his people can enjoy him and benefit from knowing him.