

Filled With The Fullness of God

Ephesians 3:14-19

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 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—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

I must tell you again how I am so personally blessed as I study and prepare for these messages each week, and especially so because of the way that we follow verse upon verse, precept upon precept.

By our doing it this way, we are able to gain such a much better grasp of these special truths of God, following thought upon thought, truth upon truth.

Last week, we studied verses 14 through 16, and they do stand alone. But they are also very connected with verses 17 through 19. And today, we will focus our thoughts mostly upon those words?

Read with me again . . .

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 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—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

Last week, I posed a question to us asking “what is real and true Christianity” and especially, “how is Christianity supposed to present itself within our souls”?

Is Christianity simply that which we see being lived out in our modern-day church, people doing their best to follow the system of Christian principles laid out for them in these scriptures, faithfully attending church, running to and fro, involving themselves in all sorts of religious activities? Is that real and true Christianity?

And is it enough that we have our system of check-lists of things to do and of ways to behave? Or is Christianity something different, something more, something far more?

I recognize that I am repeating myself in saying these words so often from this pulpit, but please bear with me. I must keep saying them because as we observe the modern-day church, it really does seem that we are being led down the same failed path that the Scribes and Pharisees took.

While trying to do good and wholesome things such as following Christian principles, faithful attendance at church, having our checklists and involving ourselves in church activities really are all good and helpful things to do, they really are not nearly enough.

Real and true Christianity is something very different and that difference is being spelled out for us in the words of our scripture text today. Simply put, Christianity is nothing short of a deep intimate and loving relationship with the person of Jesus Christ, a relationship in which He actually “moves in” and becomes “one” with us in our heart, soul, mind and spirit, one in which the Spirit of Christ actually takes up a moment by moment indwelling presence within us, one in which we allow Him to actually guide and control all the thoughts and activities and behaviors that take place in our lives each day.

Unfortunately, for most of us, such an intimate relationship does not come easily. And with some people, as with me, the process has many “up and downs”, delays and stumbles. And sometimes it even gets “put on a shelf” for a while, causing me to wonder why God doesn’t just give up on me.

But thanks be to God, He will not, ever give up. I am His son and He loves me. And I can trust His love.

And besides that, God does not waste those occasions of our stumbling and falling and making a mess out of circumstances and relationships. He simply uses them as good “teaching opportunities”.

And I confess, most of my best learning opportunities have come from my worst failures, which bespeaks the fulfillment of God’s promise in Romans 8

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Just as a small child must be allowed to learn to “toddle” without our constantly holding them up, so also, though His indwelling presence never leaves us, God is able to hold back His “big hand” so that we can “toddle” through our spiritual experiences. While still

protecting us from really bad falls, He selectively uses every circumstance as a “teaching moment”.

God is a good and loving Father, always attentive to our needs. And He always knows exactly what must take place for us to grow in Him.

And may I remind us that God will often use the hands of other people to help us along our journey of growth. I thank the Lord for my dear and faithful wife as she, often to her own hurt, patiently walks with me through my foolish stumbling.

But we must also know that God will sometimes use some not-so-loving hands in our training and up-bringing. As I look back over many of my times of stumbling, I remember some of those other, not-so-loving hands, people who were not looking out for my best interest. But again, God is always faithful to oversee my training and discipline. And He will only allow trials that are necessary for my best interest. God’s manner of parenting is truly “parenting at its best”.

Here, as these verses focus intently on the “love” of God, He is especially desirous of our understanding love from His perspective and not some of the corrupted versions that we so quickly reach for . . . here using the words,

17 . . . that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

God is God and His love is pure and holy. And it not only has, great mercy and affection within it, His love also has justice and accountability, elements of love that are hard for us to understand and accept.

And contrary to popular thinking, God is not the “grandfatherly” kind of personality that we so often ascribe to Him, that lenient, “I’ll let you get away with this one” kind of tolerance. God loves us, but He is also ever and always holy.

So please may we commit ourselves to accepting our God as He really is and not as we might like Him to be.

And may I remind us of the special truth being put forth in these words before us today, that God really isn’t just someone who walks beside us through the difficulties of our day, as some have interpreted the word “Paraclete” to mean. He does walk with us, yes. But much, much more than that, He really and actually lives within us, within our hearts, our souls and our minds.

Think about that! If you have received Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, the very Spirit of God is right at this moment living within you. I have received Him and I am confident, beyond measure that God's Holy Spirit is right now, filling my heart, my soul and my mind.

What does that truth really mean? It means that our heart is not as the medical world explains it to be, simply one of our physical organs, much like the several other organs within our bodies, with its sole purpose being to pump our blood. Yes our heart does that, but our heart is and does so much, much more.

And neither is the word "heart" simply to be taken as a metaphor that describes our inner being, as some bible scholars insist. Again, yes, it is to some degree also a metaphor. But it is also so much, much more.

It has capabilities far beyond that which any ordinary lump of flesh might have within it. In Jeremiah 17, we are told that our heart first begins as a repository of all forms of wretchedness, the seat of deceitfulness and sin. There in Jeremiah God tells us . . .

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 10 "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

(Jeremiah 17:9-10)

We came into this life with a heart that was a well-spring of all forms of sinfulness. And contrary to those sweet-sounding words of advice often given between friends that tell us to just "listen to our heart", listen instead to these words from Matthew 15!

18 . . . what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (Matthew 15:18-19)

But thanks be to God, from the first moment we receive Christ as our Savior and Lord, our heart is changed and it becomes the "home" of our God! In our "new birth", a place was made for God, and He moved in and took up residence, permanently.

Why would God do that? It is because when we are born again, born from above, we truly do become His sons. In Romans 8, we are said to be much like the Lord Jesus. Listen!

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—

heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:14-17)

In our salvation, we are forever joined as “One” with the Lord Jesus. And as our scripture text for today tells us, He lives, abides, dwells within us, close enough for us to feel His presence and to hear His “still small voice” speaking truth into our thoughts and ideas and behaviors.

Again, I realize that this message seems redundant, because it was only a few weeks ago that we spoke about this very matter of “God’s indwelling Holy Spirit”. But if God has said it again to us here in these words, I am compelled to do the same. Listen again!

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

These words bring two very important truths into focus for us, first that Christ Himself is filling and indwelling the far-reaches of our hearts; and then the most important reason for His indwelling presence within us, that of “love”, and specifically, that we personally would be able to comprehend “love” as God intends “love” to really be, to grasp the extent of its “breadth, its length, its height and its depth, the kind of divine love that goes far beyond the knowledge and rationale that the human mind can fathom. These words tell of a divine love that is only comprehensible if we have the “fullness of God” dwelling within us.

This is the kind of “selfless love” that filled the heart of God the Father as He sent His only beloved Son to die on the cross and pay the penalties for our sin.

This is the kind of “selfless love” that filled the heart of the Lord Jesus when He agreed with God the Father and conceded “not my will but thine be done”.

This is the kind of “selfless love” that causes the Holy Spirit to “grieve” when He sees us deny the precious gifts of mercy and Grace that God the Father and the Lord Jesus so freely offer to us.

Praise be to God, you and I who have Christ as our Savior really do have, and are filled with, the “fullness of God”. And all that God requires of you and me is that we “surrender” ourselves to Him.

I realize that I say this word “surrender” often, but what does it really mean? Simply put, you and I come into this world with a firm hold upon our “claim to our right to our self”, a kind of “death-grip”; and that being so, our only remedy is that we must “die” before that grip can be released.

That sounds harsh, but it is absolutely necessary. As we have learned from these scriptures, God will not just “clean up our old self”. Self is not allowed to remain within us. It is ever and always corrupt and incorrigible. Self must die in order for God to complete what the bible scholars call, the “generation of our souls”.

But as we who have been struggling with this matter of surrender can testify, it is hardest thing we have ever tried to do and is impossible through our own human efforts.

So then, how do we do it? I am convinced that it begins here in these words. It is only through the power of the indwelling presence of Christ, the “fullness of God”, that our grip on our “claim to our right to our self” begins to turn loose of its hold on our soul.

It is only as God’s indwelling presence is able to whisper His truth into our soul each moment that our corrupt heart becomes truly changed.

And my question for us before we close is, “Are we ready to do something about it? Are we ready to have our Christianity be more than just a good set of principles to live by? Because dear friends, until we actually begin to do something about it, we will forever remain as we are.

God really does want to live within us and to fill our heart and our soul with His presence. Are we ready to ask Him to do that?

These words again from Ephesians 3,

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 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—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19)