

Ephesians 3:19b

Introduction

First three steps of this prayer already considered (i) that the Ephesians will be strengthened by the Spirit, (ii) that Christ will dwell in their hearts, perfectly at home in their hearts by faith, (iii) that they might know all the dimensions of Christ's love, and be sure of it. Now Paul prays that they will be **filled with all fullness of God** (Ephesians 3:19b N.K.J.V.), **filled to measure of all the fullness of God** (N.I.V.). This is his highest ambition for his readers, and should be our highest ambition.

Paul was glad that these people who were once without Christ and without hope have been brought near, but that is only the beginning. He is concerned that they should know Christ's unsearchable riches. Far more yet to be known and enjoyed. Sounds very mystical and vague but in fact is very practical – this involves the basics of daily Christian living. So often people think that to be practical they must be active and busy, that they must have a job to do once they are saved. No! The first step is to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. To do anything for God of any value, spiritual preparation is vital. Need to know power of God and anointing of the Spirit. This vital matter is forgotten or bypassed so often.

Going to try to explain what Paul is saying here as simply as possible. Too often we know more about this in theory than in practice. Yet the subject is the secret of holiness, effective service and fruitful ministry, and real soul satisfaction. Makes all the difference between being a spiritual millionaire or spiritually bankrupt. In other words, the most urgently needed teaching in all our lives. Here is the heart and root of New Testament Christianity.

Urgent need to be broken in ourselves, and for Him to come right into the centre of our lives, centre stage. Totally possessed by Him to do with us and through us as He wills.

Meaning of phrase “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God”

“Fullness of God” is the fullness which fills God Himself. God's very being, life, nature, character, everything that makes up God – His holiness, love, power, righteousness, goodness, His “communicable attributes” (not His “non-communicable attributes”, such as eternity, omnipresence, glory). We are to be filled with these things. C.f. the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Filled with this fullness of God. In other words Christians have to come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13), **filled with the spirit** (Ephesians 5:18). **From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another** (John 1:16). **Come that they might have life and have it to the full** (John 10:10).

There is a sense in which the whole fullness of life and being is in the little finger, and every part of the body – as blood flows into every part of the body. C.f. a tree – the fullness of the tree, its very life is in every branch and twig and leaf.

And yet at the same time our capacity for God must grow. Full of God's blessing now, and even more full of Him in the future. C.f. a balloon- you blow a little air into it and you can say it is full of air. Blow in more air, it is still full of air – yet more air now – bigger than it was before. Full of air on both occasions, but bigger on second occasion. A milk bottle can be filled with sea-water. So can a big tank. Both are full of sea-water, both have the fullness of the sea – though in terms of actual volume, there is a great difference.

A young believer can be filled with God's fullness. A Christian of 60 years standing can also be filled with God's fullness. But how much more there is of God in the older person than the younger.

The picture is being filled with God, and more filled with God as we grow in the Lord. Process is never complete in this life. No real perfection till we are in heaven. Therefore though we can be full, there is always room for more of God. We go on and on to the measure of all the fullness of God. God's fullness is the measure or level.

The only one in whom the fullness of God dwelt completely was the Lord Jesus Christ. **For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him** (Colossians 1:19). **For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form** (Colossians 2:19). We are full. Then as capacity grows we become more full. **Be continually filled with the Spirit** (Ephesians 5:18). **Being transformed into his likeness with ever – increasing glory** (2 Corinthians 3:18), i.e. more and more like Christ. All God's life, resources, fullness are there but we have to appropriate them more and more.

Henry Scougal lived only 28 years. Died in 1678. Student and lecturer at Aberdeen. Also in the ministry. Wrote book which has had enormous influence "*The Life of God in the Soul of Man*". The Christian, through the new birth, has God's life in his soul. That has to grow more and more into the measure of all the fullness of God.

There are some who call themselves Christians who pour scorn on this whole idea. They claim they are practical. The social application of their Christianity is their concern. They feel it is unhealthy to be concerned with inward state. Such people are merely confessing they are blind to spiritual realities, and ignorant that those who have done most for men have been those who have been most concerned with their relationship with God – far more than mere talkers or theorists.

Results of being filled to the measure of all the fullness of God

Very practical matter – when filled with God, possessed by God, He possesses every corner and cranny of our being. Means God takes control of us and our faculties, and every aspect of our personalities. Our thinking is dominated by God. Paul says **present your bodies.... Be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. By nature, our minds are controlled by the world, and outlook of the world. Christian's mind is changed. Transformed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. He thinks spiritually, whereas to the unconverted man spiritual truth is meaningless and nonsense (1 Corinthians 2:11-16). The believer has the mind of Christ. He thinks spiritually and has spiritual values.

Amazing thing to study the way in which man's whole way of thinking, outlook and values change radically on conversion. One obvious evidence is a love for the Bible and grasp of the Bible, understanding of its truth. The emotional part of the being is affected. Deep love for God, His people, His day, His will and His law. Love of self is no longer the dominant thing. There is born a new love for others. Old love of self and concern with self is gone. People's opinions about him are not important, only God's opinion and approval matters. So also the will is under God's control. He sets aside his own will, and the big question in his life becomes "What does God want me to do or say about this?"

Paul's farewell to the elders at Ephesus, recorded in Acts 20:22-24, **I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.** No will of his own, he had surrendered it to the Lord. Only concern was to do what God wanted.

And one other point – to be filled means to be totally satisfied. Sense of emptiness and loss and meaninglessness goes and vanishes. Satisfied. In need of nothing. The filled Christian has all he needs. **Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life** (John 4:14). "To know that "shall never" means "shall never", and that "thirst" means any unsatisfied need, may be one of the greatest revelations God ever made to our souls" (Hudson Taylor).

What many would give up for perfect heart satisfaction. People spend their lives looking for it and never find it. Because it is found in only one place – when God cleanses and takes and fills the life.

Means whereby we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God

The answer is found in the earlier part of the prayer – that Christ may be at home, settled down, be ruler and master in the heart. When he takes control of all the life, then the fullness of God enters us. In deepest possible way we are united to Christ. He is in us. We are in Him. We receive His fullness. A branch is in closest contact with the vine so that fruit can be produced. It will not do to be so caught up with ourselves, so confident in our own abilities and activities. Have to abandon self totally.

Two persons, but one life – Christ and you. But because you are linked together, one life, spiritual energy as He dwells in you. All Christ is and has is ours if we are abandoned to Him and united to Him. As He takes over soul, body, mind and heart, and our will, and fills us.

What we are talking about is for every Christian and what is more this is normal Christian life by New Testament standards. **If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him** (John 14:23).

Illustration – not a motor-car, but a trolley bus – used to be a common sight in cities. Goes along street with two arms stretching upwards linked to overhead wires – linked

to the source of power. Here is picture of Christian life – linked to Christ – linked to the source of power – linked to the fullness of God.

Conclusion

Been looking at deeper truths of the Christian life recently. Christ dwelling in centre of life, disclosing personally to us all His love, and now being filled with the fullness of God. Do you know these things personally and experimentally? Let's not be satisfied with Christian babyhood – forgiven and just in the family of God. Christ did not die only that we should know this, but that we might be filled unto the measure of the fullness of God. Let us not be content with less. Give selves no rest or peace till we know what these things mean. Go to the person, speak to Him, tell Him your wants and needs. Wait on Him. Spend time with Him. Ask Him to deal with that hindrance in the life – the big capital I – self, which we are so anxious to keep in the centre of the picture.

F.B.Meyer recalls how he gave God the key to every room in life except one, one key he wanted to keep to himself. He continued to be restless, ineffective and dissatisfied. Then by the grace of God he handed over that last key. The verdict? God does not begin to deal with you until the last key is handed over.

Are you spiritually thirsty? If self-satisfied and self sufficient, you are not thirsty for God. But if you long for God in all His fullness, an intense unquenchable thirst for Christ Himself (not for blessing and power), His answer to you is **If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me** (literally “keep on coming”) **and drink** (literally “keep on drinking”) **Whoever believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him** (John 7:37-38).