

Ephesians 3:17-22
The Fullness of God.
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The Fullness of God

I'm going to continue with our study of the book of Ephesians today. We've taken three weeks to talk about what I called "The School Of Christ", and now we're going to come back to the end of the third chapter of Ephesians. We left off having talked about chapter 3 verses 16 and the first half of 17, where Paul prays that the believers be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, with the result that Christ dwell in their heart by faith. I want to pick up today with the second half of verse 17, through verse 19. Lets read it.

Eph 3:17 ...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—**19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

What does it mean to be rooted and grounded in the love of God? What is the love of God? My first inclination when reading a verse like this is always to project my own understanding and experience of natural love onto God, or into a verse, and make sense of it this way. Doing that I would understand this verse to mean something like, I need to be grounded in the fact that God loves me. Or, I need to be loving people as I understand God to love people. But I'd like to suggest to you that to be rooted and grounded in the love of God means a whole lot more than that.

What is the love of God? The love of God is far more than a way that he feels about you. There is so much talk in the body of Christ about how God feels for people. You see it on TV, on bumper stickers, billboards, etc. But for all the talk about how much God loves, there seem to be very few people who are even rooted and grounded in **that** comprehension of love. Its more of a fact that they need to remind themselves of, rather than a reality that they find themselves grounded in. But even if you could make yourself perpetually believe something about God's emotions, you still would not be rooted and grounded in His love.

The love of God is not known through a belief in or an experience of God's emotions. The love of God is known through receiving and participating in what God has given. You'll never know **how much** God loves if you are unfamiliar with **how** God loves. In other words, the measure of God's love isn't the measure of His feelings, but the measure of Christ who has been given to the human soul. With all that is in me, I know that to be a true statement. God's love is known only when what He has given is comprehended.

The love of God, simply defined, is not just what He feels, but what He has given of Himself to the human soul. Right there is the love of God. You could say that the love of God is Christ crucified...God granting you a death in His Son and a Life as His Son. The measure of God's love is the measure of God's Son. The experience of

God's love, is the experience of God's Son. And so becoming rooted and grounded in God's love, is becoming rooted and grounded in what God has given.

That is why this verse falls directly on the heels of the description of how we are empowered by God's Spirit in the inner man, and Christ comes to dwell in our hearts by faith. It picks up right there and says that we, in this way, are rooted and grounded in what God has given. He has given the Spirit of His Son to be the life of our soul.

This verse is actually quite similar to a verse that I often reference in First Corinthians 2:12, where Paul tells us that the Spirit of God has been given in order that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. What is the Spirit showing us? He is showing us the love of God - the things that HAVE been freely given.

You see, your relationship with God is a relationship of unfathomable love, but that doesn't just mean that it is a relationship where both sides feel certain strong things and think of each other in certain ways. I know that natural love is recognized primarily by how a person feels, what a person wants from another, or how much a person wants another. But the love of God is not comprehended in what He gets from us or wants from us, but rather in what He's given to us. His love is the giving away of Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. Again, the measure of His love is therefore the measure of Christ.

It is in this sense that Paul writes Romans 5:5:

Rom 5:5 Now expectation does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

This is the exact same thing. Paul says that our expectation never disappoints us. Why? Because the love of God HAS BEEN poured out in our hearts. How? By the Spirit who was given to us. Do you see how the love of God is defined here? It is defined by the Spirit of God poured out into the human heart.

And so it is in this love, this gift, this Son, that we are coming to be rooted and grounded. It is in Him, in Christ, in the heavens, sanctified in truth, aware of our true state of being. We are planted by God into His Son, and there, through the revealing of Him, through growing in the true knowledge of Him (which is what this verse goes on to describe) **we put down our roots in heavenly ground.** He becomes the foundation of all reality, perspective, motivation, life. **There is a difference between a seed laying in the soil, and a seed being rooted and grounded in the soil. There is the same difference between a Christian being in the love of God, and a Christian being rooted and grounded in the love of God.**

We talked the last three Sundays about this order - death, heaven, and then earth. First you are crucified with Christ, baptized into His death. Then you are made alive, raised, and seated with Him in the heavens. You are brought in the person of Christ into the Father. A heavenly realm, reality, and relationship...and then this reality of heaven is made manifest in the earth. Well, this verse is more or less describing what it means to put your roots down where salvation has brought you. This isn't simply believing what God has done; this is dwelling there, being anchored there, living out from there.

Psa 1:3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

Jer 17:8 For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

And so Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:18 goes on to describe just how this happens. We grow in our spiritual comprehension of the breadth and length and height and depth of this love that surpasses knowledge. What is our comprehension of the love of God? It is God's view, God's understanding of the breadth and length and height and depth of what He has given to us in and as the Person of Jesus Christ. We're not just learning about God's feelings. We're not learning to believe in God's big desire for us. We're coming to a Spirit-given comprehension of the immensity of God's gift of Christ. We're being shown the vastness and perfection of God's love in Christ.

The language here is reminiscent of the types and shadows in the Old Covenant. Abraham is given a land for His inheritance. He is told to look out to the north, the south, the east and west, and to walk the length and breadth (Gen 13:14-17). Ezekiel is shown a perfect temple. He is told by an angel to measure the height and length and breadth of each aspect. When Abraham walks the land, he comes to something of an awareness of what He had been given and where he was now to dwell. When Ezekiel measured the house of God, he was told to show the house to the house of Israel. Show them what God was giving. When we, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, begin to measure the breadth, the length, the height, and depth of God's gift of Christ, it is then that we begin to occupy what we've been given. It is then that our roots begin to go deep into heavenly ground. We are found in Him, anchored in His reality. It is only then that we can be filled up to the fullness of God.

That is the next verse. Ephesians 3:10 - that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. I am extremely interested in this phrase "filled up to the fullness of God". You could say it like this - God's fullness filling up, overtaking, every aspect of my soul. So here's the necessary question. How is it that growing in the spirit-given comprehension of God's indescribable gift causes you to be filled up with the fullness of God? How is it that the awareness of this gift causes it to work mightily in you.

If you read on into the next two verses in Ephesians 3:21 and 22, you'll find this little benediction where Paul says "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or thing, **according to the power that works within us**, to Him be the glory...etc" Paul is talking about the power of God working in the soul. He is describing how that power works in us. It works in us through comprehending the measure, the immensity of God's gift in Christ - the love of God. But now I'm asking HOW? or why? Why does truth have this effect on the soul of man.

I've been thinking a lot about this. I've been seeing it more clearly than ever. I've been seeing more than THAT it works. I've been coming to a much clearer view of why truth works the power of the cross in the human heart. Here it is in a sentence. Knowing the truth will work in you according to the power of the cross because it shows you what is already real. I've said many things like that over the years, but its becoming more and more clear.

I've been using an analogy for the past week or two in some of the small groups that sort of developed out from a message I gave a month or two ago. If you've heard it before, just listen again. The more I share it, the more I think it is helpful.

Imagine for a moment that you fell sound asleep on the edge of an enormous cliff. And while you slept you were dreaming of all of the plans you had for when you awoke. You dreamed of walking the dog, reading a good book, painting the bedroom, etc. All of these options were completely viable possibilities for when you awoke. However, while you were still sound asleep, you rolled off the edge of the cliff and began a 2000 foot plunge to the bottom of a deep chasm. Now as long as you remain asleep, and unaware of what is real, you can continue to dream all your dreams, make your afternoon plans, and smile in your heart with happy expectation, as you unknowingly fall towards the earth. Reality has indeed changed, but your awareness of reality has not been affected one bit.

BUT...what happens as you begin to awaken? You start to open your eyes and something quickly begins to change. As your awareness of what is real, what is going on, what has happened, what is happening...as it begins to dawn on your mind, you begin to become constrained by what you know to be real. For instance, you may have been planning to take a walk, but suddenly that seems utterly irrelevant. You had it in your heart to paint your bedroom, but now that is the furthest thing from your mind. Why? Because the TRUTH of the situation is making its own application to your soul. Reality is displacing dreamland. Options that were real to you as long as you were asleep, are no longer options. Ideas, thoughts, emotions, plans, motivations, etc... all of which moved and effected and defined you as long as dreamland was real, are no longer what you are seeing. You are seeing something that is ALREADY true and unstoppable, regardless of how you might think to the contrary.

It's not like you wake up and see something that MIGHT happen. No, you are seeing something that did happen, and the consequences are upon you whether you like it or not. Gravity isn't an option. It's not Isaac Newton's opinion: it's an unchanging, established law. It's not open to discussion. **You can reject it, but ONLY by pretending that it's not real.** I suppose if this person could force themselves back into a dream state, they could deceive themselves into defeating gravity...until they hit the ground. But if they wanted to open their eyes, it would be a reality that demanded obedience.

This is exactly how comprehending the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ works in your soul. The Spirit is showing you Christ who is your life. If you are born again, this has already happened, and the consequences are already upon you whether or not you have ever opened your eyes. You are seeing something that already is. The fullness of God works in you when you become spiritually aware of where you are, what you are, and all of the unimaginable implications of being in Christ. You face it...you don't have an option. You face God's finished eternal purpose, and **the power of the cross works in you because it has already been finished by Him.**

Friends, I will spend the rest of my life discovering the reality of that last sentence. If I will grow in the truth, the power of the cross will work in me because it has already been finished by Him.

As he wakes up, the man falling off the cliff will quickly find that His soul, his emotions, his plans, his thoughts, motivations, etc., fall in line with what has already happened. The consequences of what has happened are now constraining Him.

Nothing has to be done, except for him to become aware of what has been done. But for us...the fullness of God is in Christ. And Christ is in us. He is our life. It is finished. The consequences are already upon us. And you will be filled up with that fullness when you become aware of what God has done. The variable is never related to what God has done, but always has to do with the extent to which you are desiring to have your eyes opened...and really, in which world you desire to be rooted and grounded.

And with that, I'd like to say a few things today on more of a personal note. It has to do with this phrase - "to be filled up with all the fullness of God". It has to do with finishing what we've started...personally, and as a fellowship.

I'm going to try to describe something that's been going on in my heart, and I know for a fact that many will misunderstand what I'm talking about. But then there are some that will not. It seems to me that after a heart really sees the Lord for the first time there is such a celebration of reality that takes place in the soul, and it effects all things. I'm not really talking about when you first come to Christ, although there certainly is a seeing of Christ involved with that. I'm speaking more of the day you start beholding the Spirit-given realization of the cross, and it shocks you with reality. It feels like a reality brick just knocked over your house of cards...and nothing could ever be the same. Many of you know what I'm talking about. I'm talking about seeing Christ and Him crucified and all that that means.

This is real and powerful and wonderful and because its just so big, there is never a thought in the beginning of turning your heart away. In the natural it would be like falling in love. Its such a huge thing to the soul that wherever you find yourself, your heart generally stays fixed in the same spot. But like falling in love, things have a way of appearing different with time, and sooner or later the confetti starts to settle on the ground.

I'm not talking about doubting what you've seen, or turning from the truth. Christ remains real to you, you know what you saw, but then there is this fact that you're still in a body, and you have a job, and kids and hobbies...and all of that is still very present, and you find yourself, at various times, trying to decide what to make life about. I mean, the cross has taken **spiritual** relevance out of all natural things. But nevertheless, there are still natural things all around you for the foreseeable future.

So its almost like, after such an incredible encounter with the Truth of God's work in Christ, there is now this division that you understand between what is natural and what is spiritual. And that division is much more clear than how you once saw it. You used to think, for instance, that God's purpose for you had to do with your job. Now you realize that God's purpose is not in what you do, but who's life is working in you in all that you do. You used to think God was concerned that you would waste your giftings. Now you realize that your gifting and your entire life are wasted if He is not the source and life working through you in all things.

This much is good. But then comes the thought that "as long as I can recognize what is and what isn't the Lord, it is alright for me to give my heart to the earth". We don't actually say it that way, but its in our heart that way. We say "I know now that God isn't really isn't in this, but knowing that makes it safe." Or "sure this isn't

spiritual, but I'm not pretending that it is". And here is where I know I'll be misunderstood. So just tune me out if you're confused. I'm not talking about the things that are necessary because you have a body. I'm not talking about going to work, brushing your teeth, and mowing your lawn. I'm talking about the focus of the heart. I'm talking about where you are looking for gain, for benefit, satisfaction. The objects and ambitions of the heart. I'm talking about where you're sowing your seeds, and where you expect your harvest. I'm talking about where you look when you look at life, what you think when you think of your day, what you plan when you look ahead.

Sure Christ is my life. Yes, the cross is unfathomably more real and powerful than I thought...but then where are the thoughts of your mind, the desires of your heart, the purposes for this week, the enjoyment of your soul. What fills your thoughts when you drive in the car. What's on your mind when you lay awake in bed. What plans enter your heart when you wake up in the morning. What do you want out of relationships?

Three times in the past year, three different things presented themselves to my heart. Nothing at all that anyone would call sinful. In fact, each one was something that most would call useful, practical, even helpful. But I came to see each one as death in disguise because in them there was nothing of Christ and everything of gain for myself. And in each case I welcomed them into my life not realizing what I had done until my heart had lost perspective and I had found myself extremely interested in something other than "being filled up to the fullness of God".

I'm not going to tell you what the things were, because it doesn't matter what they were. Nothing is wrong as a thing. But everything is wrong if it works in your heart towards a purpose other than God's fullness filling your soul. All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial.

You know how Paul would just call a spade a spade? You've read him just blurting out things like "who has bewitched you?", or "I can tell you are still carnal", or how he even rebukes Peter to his face in the presence of many leaders. I've always wanted, and especially now, to be part of a people who would do that with one another. A people who could look each other in the face, and without regard to the bristling of the flesh or the temporary awkwardness of the situation, just say the truth simply because it's true. I'm sure it sounds better than it feels, but I wish that we didn't have such long fleshy toes that are so easy to step on. Offense is the most natural human emotion because it is how flesh always responds to truth.

Nevertheless, I want to say to myself, and to you who are my friends and family in the Lord, that everything other than Christ does not deserve your heart. And if we are finding gain, goal, purpose, or life anywhere but in Him, and in sharing Him with those who are His body, then we have found a path that does not lead to the fullness of God. And we must not allow it because it is living a lie.

We cannot, as individuals, or as a congregation, be a people that talk about Truth. My greatest nightmare would be to stand before the Lord and be known by Him as a man who talked about the cross. Our message is not words. Our gospel is not a message. It is a Person who, if you will allow it, will whittle your world down to just one thing. Sooner or later, everything else will appear to you as it already does to Him. All effort, all goals must be thoroughly and permanently fixed in one direction and towards one end - knowing the Lord in the way our verses today describe. The

breadth, the length, the height and the depth of what God has deposited in our soul in the Person of Jesus Christ. Everything else is a monumental waste of life. And I'm not going to spend any time qualifying that this morning. Sometimes I feel that I qualify things so much that I rob them of their God-intended offense. If you want to hear offensive words, then listen to these:

Jam 4:4 Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

1Jo 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Luk 16:15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Luk 16:13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (mammon is gain)

We have the opportunity here to really know God and to be a people fully occupied with sharing His Life and His Light. If the confetti has settled in your soul, it is time to call out to the Father to reveal His Son in you. It's time to make decisions in the earth that are conducive to living in the heavens. It's time to fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith...looking not to what is seen but what is unseen. We need to fight the fight of faith, and walk the breadth and width and length of the Land we've been given called Christ. We need to be a people obsessed with being filled with the fullness of God.