

Main Idea: In Paul’s second prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:14-21 we learn about praying for the fullness of God. This kind of prayer involves three ingredients.

- I. Praying for the fullness of God involves posture (14-15).
 - A. We must remember who God is.
 1. He is great.
 2. He is Father, Son, and Spirit.
 - B. We must remember who we are.
 1. We are in Christ.
 2. We are a family.
- II. Praying for the fullness of God involves petition (16-19).
 - A. May the Father strengthen your inner being (16).
 1. We must receive what God alone can give.
 2. We must cooperate with God’s Spirit.
 3. We must give attention to our inner man.
 - B. May Christ dwell in your hearts (17).
 1. Does Christ feel at home in your life?
 2. Is there any room where Christ is not welcome?
 - C. May you comprehend the love of Christ (18).
 1. We ought to be growing in our understanding of His love.
 2. We ought to do so together.
 3. We ought to do so knowing we’ll never grasp it fully.
 - D. May you be filled to the fullness of God (19).
 1. God is the standard.
 2. God offers us His fullness through His Son.
- III. Praying for the fullness of God involves praise (20-21).
 - A. God can do more than we can fathom (20).
 - B. God deserves glory (21).
 1. He receives glory in the church.
 2. He receives glory in Christ Jesus.

Take Inventory: What’s the condition of our inner man today?

This morning we’re going to learn about the privilege and importance of praying for something most of us don’t often pray for unfortunately. Good health. Satisfying jobs. Traveling mercies. Daily bread. We pray for those things, and that’s fine. But how about this request? The *fullness* of God. “That you may be filled with all the fullness of God,” was Paul’s prayer for the church at Ephesus. What is the fullness of God? Is it possible to be a Christian and experience *less* than God’s fullness? Let’s bring these questions to today’s text, read it, ponder it carefully, then come to the table together.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21

A few years ago after mowing the grass one day, I got out my weed-eater and began to do battle. With the *weed-eater*, that is. I don’t know about you, but for me the weed-eater is a tool that tests my sanctification. Getting it started is one thing, but keeping it running is another. At any rate, on this particular day I was psyched and ready as I positioned the contraption before me. *Put the choke in the full position, hold the handle firmly with the right hand, and pull the cord with the left hand.* That’s what the instructions said to do, and I did it. Over and over again, I yanked the cord, moving the choke periodically, waiting for the engine to fire. But nothing happened. I yanked

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the messages preached at WBC in 2008 and on 10/4/15.

harder, still nothing. I tried switching my hands, holding the thing down with my *left* hand and pulling the cord with my *right*. Still nothing. Frustration was mounting.

And then my wife, noticing the struggle, asked a very simple question. “Does it have enough gas in it?”

My first thought, I’ll admit, was, “What kind of question is that? There’s a serious problem with this machine, probably some carburetor malfunction. Enough gas? Surely, that’s not the problem! Or... is it?”

About sixty seconds later, after filling the fuel tank to the brim with the gas and oil mixture, the engine fired up, just like the manual said it would, and I shook my head in disbelief. It couldn’t be that simple. It just couldn’t be. But it was.

When the tank is empty, things don’t work the way they could and should. That’s not just true of weed-eaters, either. That’s true of the Christian life, as well. When your spiritual tank is empty, there will be no fire in your Christian experience. When that’s the case, the solution isn’t simply to try harder, any more than the solution for a dead weed-eater is to pull harder on the starting cord. What’s needed is something quite basic and essential, yet something we’re so prone to ignore.

In Ephesians 3, the apostle Paul calls that something *fullness*. Indeed, he prayed for it and asked God to give it to his Christian brothers and sisters in Ephesus, “that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (3:19 NIV).”

This summer we’re going to the school of prayer on Sundays. We’re learning to *pray the word* by inviting the apostle Paul to teach us how to pray. Thus far we’ve looked at two of his prayers for the Thessalonians, his prayer for the Corinthians, his prayer for the Romans, and last week his first prayer for the Ephesians. This week, our attention is riveted to his second prayer for the believers in Ephesus, a prayer for the *fullness of God*.

Listen to the following words. *Shallow. Empty. Hollow. Superficial. External.* What do those words have in common? They each express some facet of the absence of fullness. Perhaps they describe you and your Christian experience, or perhaps they describe someone you know, someone you’re burdened for. If so, what we’re about to see will be very helpful. Paul is going to show us that praying for the fullness of God involves three ingredients.

I. Praying for the fullness of God involves posture (14-15).

Notice Paul’s introductory words in verse 14-15, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.”² Please keep in mind that Paul penned these words while in chains (see 6:20). He’d been arrested for preaching Christ and was waiting for his trial date before Caesar in Rome. He wrote this letter to a church in Ephesus that was dear to him, for he had invested three years of his life there (and nearly lost his life there). He also wrote Colossians at about the same time (AD 60).

What posture did Paul utilize in this prayer? “For this reason I *kneel*,” he says in the NIV. “I bow,” in the ESV and AV. The Bible doesn’t endorse a set posture for praying. Abraham stood before the Lord when he prayed for Sodom (Gen. 18:22). Solomon stood when he prayed to dedicate the temple (1 Kings 8:22). David sat before the Lord (1 Chr. 17:16). Joshua fell prostrate upon the earth (Josh. 7:6). In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus fell on His face (Matt. 26:39). So based on Scripture, we can pray standing, kneeling, sitting, walking, and even lying down.

² NIV84 “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”

The most typical posture for a Jew in prayer was standing. This is what we see in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18. Both men *stood* to pray.

But Paul *knelt*. The posture of kneeling expressed an exceptional degree of earnestness and intensity, indicating this was no casual conversation with God.

The issue is this. When we pray, we should use a posture that's appropriate for the content of our prayer. For this prayer Paul says he *kneeled*. Posture isn't everything, and it certainly isn't primary. But posture matters. There are a couple of lessons here for us.

A. When praying, we must remember who God is. In this prayer Paul affirmed two truths about God. First, *He is great*. How great? Paul mentions "heaven and on earth" in verse 14. This God is the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. That's ample incentive to kneel in His presence.

Yet Paul here recognized something else about God, a second truth. *He is Father, Son, and Spirit*. We commented last week that in his prayer in chapter one Paul recognized the triune nature of God, and he does so here as well.

I kneel before the Father. Then in verse 16, *I pray that he may strengthen you through the Spirit*. Then verse 17, *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts*. God is one eternal being, yet He exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From Paul's example in Ephesians 1:17 we learned that in prayer we address the Father, plead the merit of His Son, and request the help of the Holy Spirit.

This is who God is. I have no right to think of Him in any other way than how He has revealed Himself in His Word. When I pray, I must remember that He is great, in a class all by Himself, worthy of reverence. But He's also personal, indeed, He's our Father if we have come to know His Son by the work of His Spirit.

B. When praying, we must remember who we are. And who are we? There's a phrase that Paul loves to use in his letters that sums up our identity. He begins this letter with it in 1:1, "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful *in Christ Jesus*." That's who you are, Paul tells his readers. You entered the world *in Adam*, and *in Adam* all die. But *in Christ* you've been made alive. You've been blessed with every spiritual blessing *in Christ*, he tells them in 1:3. God the Father chose you *in Christ* before the creation of the world, he continues in 1:4. *In Him* we have redemption and forgiveness, he explains in 1:7.

This, beloved, is who we are. This is our identity. *We are in Christ*. That's what makes prayer possible. If you are *in Christ*, you can approach the throne of God. You can do so in prayer right now and forever once you leave this world.

But there's another facet of our identity that Paul expresses in this prayer. *We are a family*. "I kneel before *the Father*," says Paul. That's family language because prayer is family talk. If we are in Christ, we are God's children, and when we pray, we're talking to the Person who gave us life and brought us into His family.

But did you notice that when Paul prayed, he didn't do as we're prone to do? He didn't act like he was an only child. In his prayer he recognized that the One he called Father has a family in heaven and on earth. Who's in this family? And how did they get there? That's what Paul has just explained in chapters 1-2.

In chapter one he explained that in eternity past God chose to form a people in Christ for the glory of His name. "In him *we* also were chosen," Paul declares in 1:11. "And *you* also were included in Christ," he continues in 1:13, "when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."

In chapter two Paul declares that though we were dead in our sins, this gospel made us right with God. But not only with God, with *each other* too. Even Gentiles (non-Jews, those formerly excluded from citizenship in Israel and without hope in the world, 2:11), if they are *in Christ*, are brought near through the blood of Christ (2:13). "For he

himself is our peace, who has made the two one (2:14).” “His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two (2:15).” “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (2:18).”

“For this reason,” Paul prefaces his prayer in 3:14. For what reason? Because of what God has done to reconcile sinners to Himself, but not just to Himself but to each too, Jew and Gentile alike. That’s the reason Paul prayed this prayer.

In fact, if we look back at 3:1 we’ll see the same connecting phrase, “*For this reason* I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.” Apparently, Paul intended to record his prayer at the beginning of chapter three, but as soon as he mentioned what Christ had done for the sake of his *Gentile* readers, he felt compelled to say more about “the mystery,” as he calls it, explaining in verse 6, “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

When Paul prayed, he kept the big picture in mind, and so should we. We’re a family, brothers and sisters, and when we pray it’s not just *me* but *we* that matters. Prayer with the whole family in mind. So first, praying for the fullness of God involves posture.

II. Praying for the fullness of God involves petition (16-19).

Yes, God graciously invites us to *ask Him for things*. And Paul did. He brought petitions to the Father. For what? You may have noticed by now that studying Paul’s prayers is a little intimidating, particularly because most of us don’t pray like Paul prayed. Oh, we ask God for things, but our wish list looks very different from his.

What did Paul ask God to give to the Ephesians? Good health? Better jobs? No. He asked for four things, four petitions, each highlighted in the text by the word “that.” He begins in verse 16, “I pray *that*...” Yet this first request wasn’t an end but a means to something else, hence a second request in verse 17, “so *that*...” Followed in the same verse by another request, “And I pray *that*.” And still another request in verse 19, the climax, “*that* you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

John Stott points out that the four requests are like a staircase with four steps, each one leading to the next, taking us upward. The steps in the prayer-staircase, says Stott, are seen in the key words ‘strength’, ‘love’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘fullness’.³

A. Step #1: Strength. May the Father strengthen your inner being (16). Here’s verse 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.” In the NIV, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...” Notice the prepositional phrases carefully.

“I pray that *out of his glorious riches* he may strengthen you” (NIV). We need what God possesses, and what God possesses (the riches of His glory), He offers to us His children.

What specifically does Paul request? “That he may grant you to be strengthened *with power*.” Simply put, this first request is for God the Father to demonstrate His *power*. God is powerful. Indeed, there is none with greater power. And Paul asks Him to give some of His power to the believers in Ephesus.

And how would this power be demonstrated? *Through* His Spirit, says Paul. That is, through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

And where would this power be demonstrated? *In* your inner being, says Paul. This request isn’t for the body. It’s not for the outer man, but the *inner man*.

³ John Stott, *Ephesians*, p. 134.

That raises an important question. Why do we need God's *power* in our inner being? The answer is we need it because there's work to be done there, and the work that needs to occur requires resources that exceed our natural ability.

The plain and simple truth is this. We may be able to convince people (and ourselves) that we're doing well in the Christian life on the outside, but we cannot change the inner man. Sure, we can carry a Bible to church, but we cannot create a heart that loves the Bible. We can recite orthodox prayers to God, but we cannot create a heart that loves to pray. We can clean up the outside, but the undeniable fact is that we lack the ability to change the inner man.

Only God can supply that kind of power. And He does. He offers His children power to transform their thinking, power to break the lusts that enslave them, and power to produce the kind of resolve necessary to follow Christ.

Which brings us to three implications. One, *we must receive what God alone can give*. Only the Father can supply the kind of power you and I need to change inside out. We must therefore learn to live dependent (not independent) lives, with humble hearts and open hands. We are needy. We are people who receive and receive and receive. From Him. Day by day. Moment by moment.

Two, *we must cooperate with God's Spirit*. The Father sent His Son to rescue sinners by means of His death and resurrection. Then after returning to heaven, the Son sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His people, and the Spirit now is the source of the power that brings about the necessary changes inside of us.

Three, *we must give attention to our inner man*. The ESV and NIV both refer to it as our "inner being." The inner man is the unseen part of us, the hidden part, the spiritual dimension to our being. Our inner man is born dead in sin (2:1), yet the inner man becomes alive when we receive Jesus Christ (2:5). Our outer man is wearing down and dying (that's why our bones creak in the mornings!), but if we're in Christ our inner man has the capacity to be transformed. Paul makes that point in 2 Corinthians 4:16, "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

I've been using a helpful resource in this sermon series, D. A. Carson's book *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*. I appreciate how God has used Dr. Carson to help me see various helpful truths from His Word and will be citing Carson again throughout this message. Carson explains, "The inner man is what is left when the outer man has wasted completely away."⁴

Then Professor Carson shares the following, "Sometimes we can see in the elderly folks something of the process that Paul has in mind. We all know senior saints who, as their physical strength is reduced, nevertheless become more and more steadfast and radiant. Their memories may be fading; their arthritis may be nearly unbearable; their ventures beyond their small rooms or apartments may be severely curtailed. But somehow they live as if they already have one foot in heaven. As their outer being weakens, their inner being runs from strength to strength."⁵

I think of our sister, Lacy Litteral, who is now in heaven. When she was ninety-four years old and bedfast, her radiant smile revealed to all who visited her that God was doing something amazing in her inner man. Seldom did I see her but that she was singing about her Savior, delighting to hear about His good work in the lives of others, and rejoicing at yet another opportunity to call on Him in prayer.

Let's not misrepresent this. It wasn't merely because Lacy was ninety-four that her inner man was strong. Growing older is not a guarantee of inner-man renewal.

⁴ D. A. Carson, p. 184.

⁵ Carson, p. 184.

As Carson shares, “Conversely, we know elderly folk who, so far as we can tell, are not suffering from any serious organic decay, yet as old age weighs down on them they nevertheless become more and more bitter, caustic, demanding, spiteful, and introverted. It is almost as if the civilizing restraints imposed on them by cultural expectations are no longer adequate. In their youth, they had sufficient physical stamina to keep their inner being somewhat capped. Now, with reserves of energy diminishing, what they really are in their inner being is coming out.”⁶

That’s a sobering thought. What we are in the inner man will come out.

How important to you is the development of your inner man, my friend? We’re so prone to make time for the outer man. We eat, exercise, rest, and take vacations. We spend money on the outer man. We ask people to pray for us concerning the needs of the outer man, and so we should. But what about the *inner man*?

Are you nourishing your inner man? You say, “How do I do that?” It’s not complicated. You feed your body. That’s good. Feed your soul with a consistent diet in the Word of God. You exercise your body. That’s good. Exercise your inner man by meditating on the Word of God, and praying, and sharing the gospel with others. Nothing energized the inner man like being in the Word, praying, and sharing the good news of Jesus with others.

And how about your kids? It grieves me to see parents who make sure their kids play sports (and I love sports!), but then say they don’t have time for family Bible reading and prayer and miss Sunday School and church and other opportunities to strengthen the inner man of their children.

Friends, God wants to strengthen our inner man. He offers to give us His strength for this very purpose. And Paul prayed to that end for his dear friends.

But why should it matter? Strength not an end, but a means to something. So let’s move up to the next step with Paul.

B. Step #2: Love. May Christ dwell in your hearts (17). Verse 17 says, “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” This is why we need power, says Paul. So Christ will be at home in us.

Let’s unpack this. In Colossians 1:19 we’re told that God was pleased to have His fullness “dwell” in Christ. In our text Paul uses the same word to depict his desire for Christ to “dwell” in the hearts of the Christians in Ephesus. The verb “dwell” means “to settle down” somewhere, or as Kenneth Wuest puts it, “to settle down and feel at home.”

Your *heart* (and with that term Paul is once again talking about the part of you that cannot be seen) is like a home. What happens when you’re at home? You kick off your shoes. You drop your guard. The outward façade, if you’ve put on one in public, disappears, and the real you comes out.

We might express Paul’s request in these terms. “I’m praying that Christ will feel at home in every room and in every corner of your heart and life.” That happens, as he says, “through faith,” since we can’t see Christ. He’s the invisible guest, and as Peter put it in 1 Peter 1:8, “Whom having not seen you love.”

Ponder carefully the first words of verse 17. “So that.” Those words indicate that Paul’s first request (in verse 16) must occur before the second request can (in verse 17). Which raises the question, *why*? Why do we need a strengthened inner man *before* Christ can dwell in our hearts?” The answer is this. Before Christ can dwell (feel at home) in our hearts, there’s some renovating work that needs to take place to make this dwelling place suitable for Him.

⁶ Carson, p. 184.

Let me illustrate. The summer before I entered the eighth grade my family moved into an old farmhouse. It was built in the early 1900's, and consequently was in need of some renovation. My parents bought the property, not because of what it *was*, but because of what they knew it could *become*. We hauled out trash and cleaned the place from top to bottom. Old and ugly wall paper had to go. Walls were painted, floors recarpeted, an additional bathroom built, a family room with fireplace added, the exterior covered with aluminum siding, and so on. Technically, that old house became the property of our family on the day the auctioneer said, "Sold!" But it took time and work for that house to become our *home*, a home which our family enjoyed for many years.

The day we came to know Christ as Savior, He took up residence in our lives by His Spirit. And what did He find the day He moved in? Some things that needed to go, right? He found the equivalent of outdated wall-paper and musty carpet that had to go. He found trash that needed removed. And so, His Spirit began a renovation process so that He might turn His residence into a place appropriate for Himself, into a real home where He is comfortable and welcome.⁷

"Make no mistake," writes D. A. Carson, "When Christ first moves into our lives, he finds us in very bad repair. It takes a great deal of power to change us; and that is why Paul prays for power. He asks that God may so strengthen us by his power in our inner being that Christ may genuinely take up residence within us, transforming us into a house that pervasively reflects his own character."⁸

Let me ask you a couple of questions. First, *does Christ feel at home in your life?* Does He like the television programs you're watching? How about the music you're listening to? When we watch and listen to ungodly entertainment, it's like pouring sewage into the living room of His abode in our hearts. What does Christ see in your heart? Is there bitterness there, or an unwillingness to forgive a brother? Are there lusts that you're feeding there?

Let me turn the question around. What *would* make Christ feel at home in our hearts? He would be at home if He found things that please Him, right? He's pleased when He finds His Word hidden in our hearts, when He sees that we're thinking about others and how to serve them, when He sees aspirations for ministry opportunities in our hearts.

The first question again. *Does Christ feel at home in your life?* Now a second question. *Is there any room where Christ is not welcome?* How about in your office where you get on your computer? Is Christ welcome when you're looking at YouTube videos? How about at your kitchen table? Does He feel comfortable there with you? Does He hear gratefulness being expressed for the food He has provided? Does He hear words of encouragement being expressed to the family members He's given you?

Is there any room where Christ is not welcome in my life? A vital question. If the answer is no, then thank Him for His grace that's brought the renovation process to the point where you can say this.

Now let's continue our journey up the staircase with Paul. Step one and petition one—Strength. May the Father strengthen your inner being. So that step two and petition two occur—Love. May Christ dwell in your hearts and may you love what He loves. Now step three.

C. Step #3: Knowledge. May you know/comprehend the love of Christ (18).

Paul's third request actually begins in the middle of verse 17 and runs through the middle

⁷ I'd indebted to D. A. Carson's similar illustration, p. 186-7.

⁸ Carson, p. 187.

of verse 18. In the ESV, “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.”⁹

The fact that Paul prayed this request reveals an assumption of his. The assumption? Christians do not appreciate the love of Christ as fully as they ought. We just don’t.

And did you notice his request for “strength” again? Paul once more asks God to give the Ephesians *strength*, this time so they can grasp the love of Christ. That sounds strange, doesn’t it? We don’t need *strength* to appreciate Christ’s love, do we? Yes, we do, and here’s why. Once again I’m indebted to an insight by Carson:

It takes nothing less than the power of God to enable us to grasp the love of Christ. Part of our deep ‘me-ism’ is manifested in such independence that we do not really want to get so close to God that we feel dependent upon him, swamped by his love. Just as in a marriage a spouse may flee relationships that are too intimate, judging them to be a kind of invasion of privacy when in reality such a reaction is of intense immaturity and selfishness, so also in the spiritual arena: when we are drawn a little closer to the living God, many of us want to back off and stake out our own turf. We want to experience power so that we can be in control; Paul prays for power so that we will be controlled by God himself. Our deep and pathetic self-centeredness is precisely why it takes the power of God to transform us, if we are to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and grow to the maturity the Scriptures hold out before us.¹⁰

I am praying, says Paul, that God will grant you the power necessary so that you may comprehend the love of Christ. Let’s talk about three implications of Paul’s third request.

One, we ought to be growing in our understanding of His love. How do we do that? For starters, according to verse 17, we must be “rooted and grounded in love.” And if we are true Christians, that’s what we are, *rooted* and *grounded/established* in God’s love.¹¹

This is where the Christian experience begins, in the love of God. Listen to Ephesians 1:4-5, “In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ.”

But Paul’s request takes it further. He’s asking the Father to enable the Ephesians to *grasp*, to *comprehend*, to *know something deeply*, something they’ve already experienced but need to experience more, namely the love of His Son. Paul wants the members of the church in Ephesus to know the breadth and length and height and depth.

Of what? To know the breadth, length, height, and depth *of what?* It’s as if Paul leaves us hanging for a moment, *intentionally*. He wants to draw us in. What subject should capture our attention and be our lifetime source of study and contemplation?

“And to know the love of Christ,” he says in verse 19. There’s the subject that should thrill our souls now and will thrill them forever.

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior’s blood?

Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued?

Amazing love! how can it be that Thou, my God, should die for me?

As John Stott explains, “The love of Christ is ‘broad’ enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jew and Gentiles, the theme of these chapters), ‘long’ enough to last

⁹ NIV “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.”

¹⁰ Carson, p. 197.

¹¹ “Rooted” and “established” are perfective passive participles.

for eternity, ‘deep’ enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and ‘high’ enough to exalt him to heaven.”¹²

It’s actually a paradox. Paul is praying that his friends will comprehend the incomprehensible!

How can that happen? How can we become more aware of Christ’s love? Paul gives us a helpful insight in verse 18 when he says, “May have strength to comprehend *with all the saints*.” With. Not by ourselves, but *with all the saints*. The NIV says, “May have power, *together with all the saints*.” This is the second implication of what’s necessary if we are comprehend His incomprehensible love.

Two, we ought to do so together. John Stott put it this way, “It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God.”¹³ Navel-gazing won’t do it. To know the love of Christ we need to be looking at each other.

What specifically should we be doing both individually and together if we want to know Christ’s love better? Again, Professor Carson’s insight is so helpful. “A genuine and deep perception of the love of Christ rarely comes to the person who is not spending much time in the Scriptures.”¹⁴ So we read the Word ourselves, and we talk about it together. That’s how we grow in the knowledge of this matchless subject.

Three, we ought to do so knowing we’ll never grasp it fully. I read that R. A. Torrey (the founder of what today is Moody Bible Institute) earnestly sought the face of God, until one day when as he was reading the Scriptures and praying, he became so overwhelmed with an awareness of God’s love for him that he began to weep uncontrollably. Eventually, he asked God to show him no more, for he could not bear it.¹⁵

Do we realize how much Jesus Christ loves us? He left heaven for us. He took hell for us. He’s preparing a place for us. “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,” says Romans 8:29. Nothing can melt the hard heart, stir the complacent heart, fortify the discouraged heart, embolden the fearful heart as can the knowledge of the love of Christ.

No, we don’t realize how much He loves us. We can’t. It “surpasses knowledge,” says Paul. And so we pray to that end. And now we’ve come to the top of the staircase.

D. Step #4: Fullness. May you be filled to the fullness of God (19). Notice verse 19 in the ESV, “That you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” In the NIV, “That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

What exactly is Paul asking? D. A Carson explains, “To be ‘filled to the measure of all the fullness of God’ is simply a Pauline way of saying ‘to be all that God wants you to be,’ or ‘to be spiritually mature.’”¹⁶

When it comes to fullness, God Himself is the standard. “Be perfect as you Father in heaven is perfect,” said Jesus in Matthew 5:48. But we’re sinners. We can’t attain to God’s standard, to God’s fullness. But His Son did. As the God-man, Jesus lived a perfect life. Jesus fulfilled everything that God expected of us that we missed.

And now God offers us His fullness through His Son. Christ was everything God wanted us to be, and through faith in Christ we can become all that God wants us to be.

Watch how these requests work together. Do you desire to experience the fullness of God, to be all that He intends you to be, to be spiritually mature in the likeness of His

¹² John Stott, p. 137.

¹³ John Stott, *Ephesians*, p. 137.

¹⁴ Carson, p. 194.

¹⁵ Told by Carson, pp. 193-4.

¹⁶ Carson, p. 195.

Son? If so, then you need His power. You need His power to be working in your inner man, strengthening you, transforming you, taking out the garbage, renovating the house. And then, by faith, you need to invite the Living Christ to take up residence in your heart, opening every room to His presence and purposes. And once He's abiding in your heart, then you need more power, power to equip your mind to comprehend the subject that goes beyond all comprehension, the subject of His love for you. And then, as the knowledge of His love increasingly captures your gaze, you become more and more like Him, and in so doing you become filled with the fullness of God.

This brings us to the third ingredient. Praying involves posture, petition, and *praise*.

III. Praying for the fullness of God involves praise (20-21).

Who in their right mind would be so bold as to ask God to manifest His fullness to undeserving sinners? Only someone who knew what Paul knew about God.

A. God can do more than we can fathom (20). Verse 20 in the ESV, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us."¹⁷ There's another mention of *power*. This time Paul indicates that God's power is *at work within us*.

How so? What are some ways God's power is working in us? Study this letter and you'll see. God's power is at work transforming us (1:4), keeping us secure (1:14), accomplishing ministries through us (4:12), maturing us (4:13), producing thanksgiving in us (5:20) and proper relationships among us (5:21ff), and protecting us from the deadly attacks of the devil (6:10-12). And because of this (and a million other reasons)...

B. God deserves glory (21). "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Glory! Honor! Praise! And where does Paul say God receives the glory He desires and deserves? Don't miss this.

1. *He receives glory in the church.* Yet also...

2. *He receives glory in Christ Jesus.* I'm always intrigued by the order. Paul puts church first here before he mentions Christ. Why? I'm not sure. Perhaps it's because the two are in reality one and the same. The church of Jesus Christ *is* the body of Jesus Christ, the God-ordained, God-designed instrument through which God is manifesting His fullness and thereby bringing glory to Himself both now and forever.

Friends, the church is not some clunky, take-it-or-leave-it option, not according to Paul. The church is where the action is. The church is where the glory to God is. So praise Him for His church. Be a part of His church. Love His church. Serve in His church. Protect His church.

"Amen," says Paul as he concludes this prayer. So be it. It's true.

Dear friends, when the tank is empty, things don't work the way they could and should. The solution isn't to try harder. The solution is the fullness of God. And this is the kind of praying we need at WBC and in our families.

As we prepare to come to the Lord's table, let's take inventory by asking an important question. *What's the condition of our inner man today?* Let's be honest with ourselves. So much is at stake, for our own good and for His glory.

Song of Response: #203 "*And Can It Be?*" (all four verses)

Communion

This evening: "*Heaven: A Needed Reminder of What Is Coming*" Revelation 21:9-27

Monthly business meeting

¹⁷ In the NIV, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."