

St. Paul's Prayer for the Fullness of God.

by Daniel Steele

Paul's prayer in the Epistle to the Ephesians is a model for believers to pray for the strengthening of their inner man, the abiding of the Spirit, and the fullness of divine glory.

Scripture: Galatians 3:3

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Christian Living"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the Epistle to the Ephesians, highlighting its elevation through the spirit of inspiration and its three-fold basis: the will of the Father, the atonement of the Son, and life in the Holy Spirit. The prayer in chapter 3 focuses on strengthening believers for a clearer knowledge of Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and the fullness of divine glory. Steele emphasizes the importance of Christ taking up a lasting abode in believers' hearts through faith, leading to a joyful experience of Christianity and a conscious presence of Christ in all aspects of life.

Transcript

Nowhere in the Scripture is the wonderfully elevating effect of the spirit of inspiration more evident than in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The writer is manifestly lifted above his natural plane of thought to height above height, making this Epistle by far the most difficult of all the writings of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Hence, it is a sealed book to the unspiritual man, however high his mere power of reason. He who with Spirit-anointed vision pierces to the foundation of this Epistle will find that it rests upon a three-fold basis -- (1) the will of the Father as the origin of the church; (2) the atonement of the Son as the ground of our adoption; and (3) life in the Holy Spirit as the scope and end of the gospel.

The prayer in the third chapter of this Epistle relates to the last of these foundation stones. It presupposes repentance, justification, regeneration, and entire sanctification. Hence it is a model prayer for those in whom sin has been destroyed. The three-fold aim of such a prayer is, (1) the strengthening of the inner man for a clearer intellectual knowledge of Christ, the revelation of God; (2) the abiding of the Spirit, the communication of God; and (3) the fullness of divine glory, or all the fullness of God.

Chap. 3:14-21. The cause for which he bows his knees is a repetition of the first verse. Hence it refers to the last words of chapter 2, the true temple of the Father, built in the Son, inhabited by the Spirit. Paul prays that each believer, and the aggregate of all the believers in Ephesus, may become such a holy temple. The first petition is that they might be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. The vessel is too weak and too small to contain all that God desires to pour into it. It must be enlarged and

strengthened. The Spirit is the agent for this work. The measure is according to the riches of his glory. A king gives like a king, a God works like a God. He wants to do his most glorious work in every believing soul. This he accomplishes when the human conditions are fulfilled. The chief condition is faith as expressed in verse 17.

"That Christ may take up his abode in your hearts." This rendering gives the force of the aorist tense, "that Christ may take up his lasting abode."-- Alford and Ellicott. This implies, not destitution of the Spirit who represents Christ, but rather that the soul has not yet become his permanent abode.

Meyer says that opposed to this taking up of the lasting abode of Christ, is a transient reception of the Holy Spirit, as in Gal. 3:3, "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" This is a searching question which many modern believers of the Galatian type would do well seriously to ponder. Their eager pursuit of worldly pleasures, their dallying with temptation, their inquiry, What harm in the dance, the drama, and the card party? -- all too painfully prove that the Holy Comforter, the artesian well of water, is not in them springing up into everlasting life. They could not answer as did Ignatius when, on his trial, he was asked by the emperor, "What is the meaning of your name?" -- "Theophorus" (God-bearer) -- he promptly replied, "he who has Christ in his breast." Oh that there were more of these conscious Christophers bearing Christ about in the street, the car, the shop, the field, and the mart!

Men and women of this sort are never at a discount in God's reckoning. They are the salt of the earth -- yea, of the church too.

It is instructive to note that Christ dwells only in the vital center of our being, not in the tongue, which would produce only a mouth religion, not in the hand, which would make a lifeless routine of works, but in the heart, which rules the tongue, the hands, and the feet, making them the instruments of a glad and willing service. He never takes up his abode in the brain alone; but it is his purpose, after taking possession of the heart, to extend his conquest to the head. To reverse this order would reduce Christianity to a theory instead of a joyful experience. Alas, too many have proved the truth of this declaration. A Christ flitting through the intellect now and then, gives no such repose of soul as the Christ who becomes a permanent resident of the heart, year after year, and decade after decade. The beauty of this is that he who carries him through life will have his presence in death. A good lady in a love-feast once said, "I mean to carry heaven with me through life, then I shall be sure of it at the end of my journey."

The door through which Christ comes in and takes up his abode in the heart is faith. Faith widens the soul so that more and more can be grasped. It has been said that "more depends upon taking in faith than upon giving and doing in love. For the more we take of the fullness of God, the more we can live." Faith is the inner man's vision, his reason, and his light. Such faith is possible when the heart is purified of sin. Then the eye is purged of film. The pure in heart see God. Only they have a spiritual perception which makes him real.

"Ye having been rooted and grounded in love," rooted like a tree and grounded like a building. Those for whom Paul prays are to become established in love through the strengthening of their inner man by means of the Spirit, and through Christ's taking up his permanent abode in their hearts. Being established in love, they are able to have some realization of the greatness of the love of Christ. Love has eyes for the perception of spiritual realities. In Christianity he that loveth not knoweth not. The reverse is true in respect to things of this world. They must be known before they can be loved.

"In order that ye may be fully able [Alford] to apprehend [R. V.] with all saints." The tense of the verb "apprehend," Ellicott. suggests, implies the singleness of the act, as if through the instantaneous perfecting of love, there comes a sudden revelation of God to the soul, in the face of his adorable Son revealed by the Holy Spirit.

This is the highest and most precious knowledge, for the excellency of which Paul counts all things to be loss, prefacing his declaration with a "yea, verily," as if he thought he had made a splendid bargain. This knowledge, which is so personal that Paul seems in the words, "My Lord," to be its exclusive possessor, he now desires only as the common property of "all saints," because he has found out that Christ can give himself entire and undivided to every perfect believer. Blessed paradox! I do not wonder that an old saint in Wales declared that "Jesus Christ was a Welshman, because he always speaks Welsh to me."

When he prays that the believers in Ephesus may be fully able to apprehend (R. V.) with all saints, he hints at the idea of the equal privilege of all, ascribing to the humblest Christian the highest and most precious knowledge (Phil. 3:8.) Thus men at the top of their transfigured natures stand on a level in the democracy of saintship, rather of kingship; for "He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father." --Rev. 1:6. R. V. The distinguishing privilege of the priest is access to God.

The four dimensions borrowed from the relations of space -- though there are properly but three -- are intended to express that comprehensive knowledge of all essential truths which St. John includes in the anointing of the Spirit, which teaches all things necessary to life and godliness. "And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ." Here we have acutely conjoined contraries purposely devised by the great apostle to show the immense superiority of heart knowledge to head knowledge. Indeed, mental science has no place for the former in its enumeration of man's cognitive faculties. It recognizes only the intellect. This is correct so far as the unregenerate man is concerned, for "spiritual things are spiritually discerned." The love of Christ is a spiritual thing. By these words we do not understand our love to Christ, but a vivid realization of his boundless love to us who evangelically believe.

Paul reaches the climax when he prays, "That ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God." (R. V.)

"Love strong as death, nay, stronger;

Love mightier than the grave;

Broad as the earth, and longer

than ocean's widest wave.

"This is the love that sought us,

This is the love that bought us,

This is the love that brought us

To gladdest days from saddest night,

From deepest shame to glory bright,

From depths of death to life's far height,

From darkness to the joy of light."

Bonar

It becomes us not to dogmatize with confidence, but to speak with modesty on a theme so high and difficult. We would suggest that the petition is that ye may be so filled with the Holy Spirit and with all his gifts and graces, as God is filled. This is expressed in a mandatory form by Christ (Matt. 5:48), "Be ye also perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Something more than initial Christian life is here prayed for by Paul in behalf of the church in Ephesus. The new birth begins with the love of God in the heart, shed abroad by the Holy Spirit. But such a heart is narrow and needs enlargement; it has remaining defilements which need cleansing. So there are steps and intervals between spiritual infancy and manhood. The crowning act of this process of development is here denoted by the being filled with all the fullness of God. Elsewhere it is expressed by the prayer, "The God of peace himself sanctified you wholly."-- 1 Thess. 5:23, R. V. Both the filling and the sanctifying are in grammatical forms which imply singleness of action, however long the preparation may have been.

Who can adequately unfold the wealth of meaning in the magnificent ascription with which this inspired prayer concludes? Paul, having prayed for surpassingly excellent blessings for the Ephesians, with a wisdom more than human, lays in their minds a foundation for faith, by his striking portrayal of the almighty power of him who hears and answers all true prayer offered in the name of his Son. This thought, left as the last impression on the mind of the reader, is the very seed out of which faith will spring up. Let the Christian who is praying, "Lord, increase my faith," help the Lord answer this prayer by an analysis and a minute study of this wonderful doxology. Note the strength of the terms indicating the ability of God to impart all the petitions of this comprehensive prayer. He is able to do not only all we ask or even think, but "above" this; and not only above, but "abundantly," overflowing "above." When Paul had written this, the thought of how much God had done for him caused him to strengthen the expression by the word "exceeding," interlined, perhaps, before "abundantly." Thus, the original idea of ability is, as the mathematician would say, raised to the third power by being thus twice multiplied into itself. We are then invited to contemplate the measure, the yardstick if you please, by which God works "according to the power that worketh in us." All the past manifestations of his omnipotence in creation, providence, and redemption, are only specimens of that power which stands ready to do the bidding of human faith, pleading the infinite merit of the adorable Son of God, repeating the miracle of the creation of the sun in the heavens with glories more transcendent; "For God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

"To him," God the Father, "be the glory," the whole glory accruing from all his gracious dealings, "in the church, the sphere of God's glory before men and angels too." Eph. 3:10, R. V., "To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church, the manifold wisdom of God." Thanks to the Revision for bringing out to English readers the astonishing idea that archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, are pupils studying the manifold wisdom of God, and using the Christian Church as their lesson-book. All of his moral attributes -- love, holiness, justice, wisdom, and truth -- are most clearly revealed in the heavenly places when they are seen in the mirror of a sanctified church on the earth. From this conception in the mind of Paul, the sublime prayer in this chapter is a natural sequence. Let every believer who aspires after the highest spirituality daily repeat it. Let every pastor teach his church to pray this prayer in concert in the prayer meetings, and every leader teach his class to repeat it in every class-meeting, for their own good, and for the instruction of the archangels on their thrones above.

"Yes, measure Love when thou canst tell
The lands where seraphs have not trod,
The heights of heaven, the depths of hell,
And lay thy finite measuring-rod
On the infinitude of God."
T. C. Upham.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/daniel-steele/st-pauls-prayer-for-the-fullness-of-god/>

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