

Opening Words

As God gets more of us, as we yield more areas to him, as we let him strengthen our character and our faith, we will find ourselves experiencing more of him. He, who lives in us, already, will dwell in our hearts by faith.

146 Eph How to Be Filled Up with God 3

When I was about 20, and getting familiar with the Word of God, I was having a Bible study with another young man - about my age - and he was trying to convince me about an experience I needed to receive everything God had for me. He called it “the heavenly plentitude.” I had never heard of that before, but I remember getting a funny feeling – like it was something unbiblical.

I remembered something else, it didn’t square with what Paul taught in Ephesians 3. I shared with him what I had been reading and learning in this passage – that really, the way to be filled up with God was to be filled up with his love. We looked at the verses together and guess what, he didn’t bring it up anymore.

The clear teaching of the Word of God protected me and hopefully instructed him. What does this passage say about being filled up with God? Let’s listen Paul’s words again.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

There it is – the great goal that all people have been aspiring to, whether they realize it or not is to be filled up with the fullness of God. But the way Paul gets to this place of fullness is different than the way many people teach. Although the prayer is experiential, Paul does not tell us to seek a one-time experience and then we will be full of God in every way forever and ever.

Instead, Paul prays that a process will take place in our lives and when we examine it, we see that it takes time. Paul shows us that our inner man, first, must be strengthened so that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, and then we will be able to comprehend the depths of his love and will be filled up with the fullness of God. The first step is the strengthening of our inner man, the second step is Christ indwelling us, the third step is comprehending his love, and the final step is being filled up with God.

Let me pause, though, and answer a question that could be troubling some of you. You may be asking, “I thought if I received Christ as my Savior, I already had all of God in my life? If I have all of God in my life why do I need to pray to be filled up with God?”

Great questions – let me try to answer them. Yes, if you have received Christ as your Savior, God himself has come to live within you. You don't need more of God. You already have him completely. Many verses of Scripture teach this. In John 14:23 Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him." Here we see the Father and the Son coming to live in people.

When Peter preached to the Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost after he and the other believers had received the Spirit of God he said, ""Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Here we see the Spirit of God coming to live in his people.

In Colossians 1:27 Paul said that the riches of the glory of the mystery is that Christ dwells in us!

We could point to other verses to show that God dwells in every believer. That is an amazing thought! God lives in us! This is why Christ died, rose again, and was enthroned – that God might live in his people.

But if God already lives in us – why does Paul pray that our inner man will be strengthened so that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith?

He prays this because even though *all of Christ* is in us from conversion, we don't always experience him living in us because of the weakness of our inner man and the weakness of our faith.

Who among us experiences Christ all the time? Yes, He is there all the time but who among us can say that our walk with God, from the very beginning was so strong that we always were aware of him and always saw his power in us and through us? I know I cannot. He has always been in me in all his fullness, but I have not always walked by faith. He has always been in me in all his fullness, but my inner man has been weak in many ways – weakened by unbelief, weakened by pride, weakened by wrong desires, weakened by so many things that Christ could not express himself in my life and through my life with power because my inner man was weak. Paul prays for the strengthening of the inner man.

Notice that he says, "that he would strengthen you with power." Have you ever been hungry, and you couldn't wait for dinner and you grabbed a bag of chips and ate them. It gave you a little strength but only a little and then the bad parts of the chips began to take effect and you start feeling sick. My son, Nate, drank one of those advertised 5-hour power drinks. He said it was great for five hours but what the advertisers don't tell you is what happens during the 6th hour! You come crashing down.

We know the difference between being strengthened, temporarily, with junk food and junk drink and being strengthened with good nutrition for a healthy life. In the same way, Paul prays that we would be strengthened with power in the inner man by the Spirit. This strengthening comes when we partake of the healthy food and drink of the Spirit that empowers us for a healthy spiritual life. This healthy food and drink comes from focusing on what Christ has done for us. This is what Paul has patiently taught in this book.

This empowering takes time. It takes time for an athlete to build himself up physically to compete, and it takes time for our inner man, our inner self to become stronger. As we become stronger we experience more of Christ in our life. Does this makes sense? It is not receiving more of God. It is God receiving more of us.

As God gets more of us, as we yield more areas to him, as we let him strengthen our character and our faith, we will find ourselves experiencing more of him. He, who lives in us, already, will dwell in our hearts by faith.

It's like God is a long-distance runner. He wants to run with us through life. But we are out of shape. We may only be able to run a block or two with him. But he says, "That's OK. We have to start somewhere." And he works with us and trains us and build us up so that we can jog with him one mile, two miles, five miles, ten miles and so on. Finally, one day he says, "I think you are ready, let's run a marathon together," and off we go with the Lord experiencing the thrill of running the race with Christ. But we can only do this as we let him condition us and prepare us for this kind of life. This is what Paul is praying in these verses when he speaks of the strengthening of the inner man so that we will experience Christ.

Brothers and sisters, this is what the Church greatly needs today. It needs Christians who have strong inner character and who have strong faith because when God's people are this way Christ's presence will be known in them and through them. What the world needs to see and hear is Christ Jesus. He is the Lord. He is the Savior of the world. The world needs to see Christ in us.

I ask you today – are you ready to run the race with Christ? Are you ready to let him work on your inner man? Are you ready to stop resisting his work in your heart? Do you have areas you can identify in your life where you need to give him control? Give those areas up to his dominion. Let Christ dwell in that part of your heart.

Did you ever read the pamphlet called, "My heart, Christ's home"? It pictures Christ coming into our homes in conversion. But as he lives in our homes, we sometimes shut off some rooms in our house. Maybe we let him into the dining room, but do we let him into the family room? Do we let him into our bedroom? Do we let him look in out attic, our closets, and our basements?

Do we lock off some rooms in our heart from him saying, "Lord, you can go this far, and no further"? Paul prays that we would find the strength to let Christ into every room of our hearts. Paul prays that Christ would be at home in every part of our heart by faith.

Let's pray about this together.

"Father, I think that this is a key area for a lot of people. A lot of people get stuck here. They have all of you, but they are not willing to let you walk through every room in their heart and clean out what needs to be cleaned out, heal what needs to be healed, and strengthen what needs to be strengthened. I pray that you would strengthen the faith of your people to let you do this. Father, this prayer says that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. Grant a strengthening of faith against all things that harm us – shame, feelings of inadequacy, and any fears that may come into our hearts.

Word of God, Speak! – Ephesians – Wonders of the Spiritual World
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Grant strength by your Spirit according to the riches of glory in Christ in our inner man that Christ may dwell in power in us.”