

Opening Words

Do you feel weak? Do you feel like you have insurmountable problems? Do you have a nasty habit that you just can't shake? Don't be overwhelmed by it. The Holy Spirit knows exactly what is going on, the depth of the problem, and the power that he has to strengthen you so that Christ may dwell in your heart by faith.

145 Eph How to Be Filled Up with God 2

"I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named," Paul said. The greatness of God's work in Christ dropped Paul to his knees in adoration and prayer. In Ephesians 3 and verses 14-15 Paul prayed to the Father from whom every **family** in heaven and on earth receives its name.

Paul mentions the Father and his family in this verse. The Greek word for Father is pater and the word he uses for family is patria. You can hear the similarity in sound. Family is the meaning of the word, patria, but this is a deliberate play on words by Paul to remind us that every family on earth and every father on earth derives its existence from the Creator who is the Father of all.

Sometimes we forget that God is Father because he created us. He wants to be Father through redemption because the created sons of God, have strayed from the family of God and have been sold into slavery. The Father has provided a way for the created sons of God who are enslaved to sin and to the evil one to find release from this slavery and to come back into the family of God. This is through Jesus Christ.

When Paul says that every family in heaven and earth derives its name from the Father, Paul is making a biblical worldview statement here. The idea of family comes from God the Father of all. This is a crucial point to understand in these crazy days in which we hear that there can be all kinds of families such as two daddies in this family or two mommies in that family. Well, if the idea of family is just a creation of man, that could be true. If family is just man's idea, then we are free to make up new definitions for family and for marriage.

But we hold to the truth that the idea of family comes from God himself and that on earth every family derives its legitimacy from the Father above, the one before whom Paul bowed his knees as he prayed. We must walk carefully in this truth lest our culture find itself blaspheming the Father in heaven, the creator of all.

And fathers, let me say one quick word to you. Your fatherhood and your expression of it to your children should reflect the Father in heaven. You are shaping your children and you have an opportunity to give them a picture of God. I know you are not perfect in this. I know that because I was not a perfect father and am not a perfect father today to my grown children. But I did give them a picture of the divine Father that has remained with them and influenced them to seek God in their lives. And by the grace of God you can do the same.

I think also that when Paul used this phrase, about every family in heaven and on earth, he also had one family primarily in mind and that is God's redeemed family – some of which are now in heaven and some which are still on earth. But we are one family and a day is coming when we will be united around the throne of God. This fits with Paul's emphasis in this letter where he has labored to explain how Jew and Gentile are one family. In 2:19 he said we are all of God's household.

Paul bowed his knees before the Father in heaven, the creator of all families and especially the redeemer of the eternal family in Christ and when Paul prayed he asked God for four things in this prayer. He prayed for strength for the inner person, for greater intimacy with Christ, for comprehension of the love of God, and for being filled up with God.

These are not four unrelated requests but are steps that get us to a goal. The goal is to be filled up to the fullness of God in verse 19, but the way to get to that goal is to be strengthened in the inner man (verse 16) so that we can experience more of Christ (verse 17) so that we can comprehend God's love (verse 18) and in that comprehending of God's love, we will be filled up with God (verse 19). See how that works?

Let's talk about the first stage– the strengthening of our inner man, our inner self. What is this? This is our human nature that has been polluted and weakened and distorted by sin. This is our will that has made wrong choices or refused to make choices at all or stubbornly held onto old ways. This is our intellect that was compromised by lies. This is our emotions that has been turned inside out or stifled so that we no longer feel as we should feel.

Sin has distorted our inner man in various ways but when the Spirit of God comes into us, He comes into our inner man and begins the process of changing us. It's quite a task. Sometimes I have felt sorry for the Holy Spirit. I realize that is probably a ridiculous thing to say, but when I think about the brokenness of our lives on the inside and the project he has to put the broken pieces back together, I think, "Lord, I'm sorry for what you see and what you have to do." But that is why he is God. He is faithful to put the pieces back together and he does it gladly and with love because he is the covenant God who keeps his promises to us.

He reshapes our will so that we learn to be submissive to Christ, to make right choices, to be pliable instead of stubborn and to learn to make a stand for Christ and not be a pushover. He reshapes our intellect so that we learn the truth about God and about life and we see the world from a biblical perspective rather than a secular worldview or from a false religion. He transforms us by the renewing of our mind as Paul put it in Romans 12:2.

He reshapes our emotions. This is a tough one because emotions are ... so emotional! I sound like a dictionary definition don't I by using the same word. But I said it that way on purpose because all of us have so many emotional hang ups – feeling unworthy, feeling unloved, feeling tainted, feeling dirty, or taking delight in things that are harmful to us. God must heal our damaged emotions so that we learn to feel about things the way God feels about things. Remember, God is a God of emotions. God feels anger, sorrow, and joy. And he created us to experience emotion just as he experiences emotion. This is why Paul said we should weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

As God brings healing to our inner self, we find that we can experience more of Christ. And God does more than heal, he strengthens the inner man. We can say that healing is the first step but strengthening is the second. We are like people who have been in a terrible auto accident. We may be laid up in a hospital for a while while our bodies heal from the trauma of the accident. But once enough healing has taken place, the hospital staff will work with us to strengthen our muscles. I had my appendix taken out several years ago. The surgery took place about ten at night and the hospital staff had me up and walking the next morning! I wanted to sleep and rest and enjoy all these people waiting on me. They wanted to strengthen my body so I could check out of the hospital and get back to a normal life!

That is what God wants to do for us. He wants to get us to a normal life, the normal life he intended for us from the beginning. This normal life is only possible if we are filled up to the fullness of God and this is only possible if we comprehend his love and this is only possible if we are growing in intimacy with Christ and that is only possible if our inner self is growing stronger. Do you see how the prayer works?

Paul says, “I pray that God would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit in the inner man.” As our healing advances, God puts us through more vigorous training to strengthen those spiritual muscles. He puts you in situations that require faith. He puts you in situations that require humility. He puts you in situations where you must forgive. He puts you in situations where you must ask forgiveness. He designed these and a multitude of other lessons to stretch our spiritual muscles. No pain, no gain is just as true for the soul as for the body.

But look at the prayer again. Paul said, I pray that God would grant this inner strengthening *according to the riches of his glory*. Warren Wiersbe, the great Bible teacher said if a millionaire gives you ten dollars he is giving to you out of his wealth. But if he gives you a hundred thousand dollars he is giving to you according to his wealth.

God strengthens us according to his spiritual wealth. And how does he measure it? He calls it the riches of his glory, and in saying this he is pointing to the riches that he has in Christ Jesus for you. Christ is so rich in forgiveness that he was able to forgive all our sins. Christ is so rich in power that he can seat us with him in heavenly places. Christ is so rich in grace that he has infinite resources to heal and strengthen us and it is his will to do that for us. Remember, Paul said he preached to the Gentiles the infinite riches of Christ and here is praying according to the infinite riches of Christ – according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Do you feel weak? Do you feel like you have insurmountable problems? Do you have a nasty habit that you just can’t shake? Don’t be overwhelmed by it. The Holy Spirit knows exactly what is going on, the depth of the problem, and the power that he has to strengthen you so that Christ may dwell in your heart by faith.

Paul prayed this for you. You can pray it for yourself. You can pray it for others.