

Filled with God's Fullness

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Preacher: Billy Graham

[0 : 00] Chapter 3 in Paul's letter to the Ephesians and looking there in the passage from verse 14 as far as verse 19.

In verse 19 we read these words where Paul says that he wants us to know this love that surpasses knowledge.

That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

I don't know how you react when you read this passage of the Bible.

It really should send shivers down our spines because it is something truly awe-inspiring.

[1 : 03] These days we are used to having lots of superlatives. You hear people speaking about something or someone who is absolutely fabulous or something that was tremendous.

My brother has a little grandson who with his family recently moved to the United States and he was attending nursery and one of the first words he came home with was, it is awesome, our American friends like that word.

The Apostle Paul loved superlatives as well and no wonder.

He was dealing with God. He was telling us about the Son of God.

He is telling us about the salvation of God and in this passage that we have read and in the previous one in chapter 1, he is telling us about the love of God, the subject that Neil was dealing with this morning and that we will be dealing with again this evening.

[2 : 42] The love of God beyond understanding, says Paul, surpasses knowledge. Absolutely awesome.

This is Paul in one of his quieter moments as he tells us at the beginning he was in prison and he had time to write a more general letter.

Pastoral, instructive, telling us about the wonder of the Christian life.

Rather than having to deal with a specific problem in a particular congregation where something bad had occurred, a letter that like Colossians was intended as a round robin to be read in different congregations.

It is a very human letter too in the sense that Paul as he often does gets sidetracked at times and goes off at a tangent. For example, if you read verse 1 in this chapter and then go down to verse 14, you can just carry on from there because from verse 2 to 13 is in brackets, as it were, where he starting to speak about the Gentiles, goes off in a little discourses about the Gentiles and God's plan of things and so on and their relation to the Jews so that they together form the church of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 43] But if these bits are put in brackets, it's not because they're unimportant. It's all part of God's Word and it's always sprinkled with superlatives.

But look for a moment with me at the passage from verse 14. Paul, let's remember, is writing to Christians. People who have already come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. But now he's praying for them and in his prayer, as he addresses God the Father, he is looking at God's people as the family of the Heavenly Father and he stresses this at different times throughout this letter and that family is the church of Jesus Christ.

And that family is God's family through Christ and receives power from the Holy Spirit.

And you see here the working of the glorious Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit. But when he speaks to the Father specifically, as I say, he's speaking about the fact that we Christians together, our family, all the saints he speaks of here in verse 18 are God's family.

And that family is made up of children from all different backgrounds. We're all different people and we're all recipients of the immeasurable love of God.

[6 : 48] So the first thing that Paul asks of the Father here for these Ephesian Christians, part of God's family, and of course he is asking them for us as well, is the strength and the power of the Holy Spirit to give us a settled grasp of the fact that Jesus Christ is living in our hearts through faith. Now of course it is true that when we come to believe in Jesus at our conversions where we trust in Jesus and he comes to live in our hearts, but sometimes that knowledge seems to get thrown into the background of our experience.

And what Paul is wanting here is that we have a thoroughly firm and settled understanding of this fact, a really strong faith, a trust that Christ is indeed living in our hearts. He's not a believer, he's a permanent resident in your heart and in my heart when we are Christian people.

He's not here today and gone tomorrow. He comes to stay permanently. That's the meaning of Paul's language in this passage and he is stressing it when he uses these two two figures of speech about being firmly rooted, firmly established. It means just that very thing that he wants us to understand it for an actual fact. Because it's this fact of knowing Christ in us that keeps us strong when the storms of life hit us or when the devil who was always trying to cast us down and to cast doubts on our faith when he attacks us or when friends may taunt us for being Christians, trying to destroy our faith. Paul wants us to have a strong understanding of Christ in us and this comes, he says, through the work of the Holy Spirit and that is what he prays the Spirit will do for us and we must pray for that as well. And in the second place, Paul prays that the Christians may be a people bound up in the great circle of God's love.

Having a strong grasp of knowing Christ in us is a truly great privilege. But if you look here at verse, the second part of verse 17 and it's worth remarking that this whole passage from verse 14 to 19 was written as one sentence in the original. So he's piling thought after thought after thought and as we'll see when we come to the end of the passage, the really climax of his thinking comes there. But if you look at the second part of verse 17 which in the NIV is a new sentence, he says, 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. Now that is something that really blows your mind when you think about it. It is both, it tells us rather both the reason why Jesus has come to live in our hearts and also what effect this will have upon us. Paul is speaking about love. Love which flows out from God in what we might call great waves of salvation of which John chapter 3 and verse 16 is a wonderful summary that he so loved the world, loved it in such a way that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but should have everlasting life. And it is that love which has reached to save us if we are Christians and we know that that love has brought a fundamental change to our lives in our attitudes towards God. That's what Neil was saying this morning and every believer should be able to say what Paul as he tells us in another place that he, Jesus Christ, loved me and gave himself for me and in consequence we should be able to respond and say and I love him. And just as Paul stressed that Christ's presence in our hearts is a permanent reality so he is stressing that the love of God in us is also a permanent reality being rooted and grounded in love, firmly established. But we've got to grasp the implications of that love.

It's so wonderful says the apostle it surpasses knowledge but it's a love that as well as flowing into us must also flow out from us. Our hearts mightn't be like the the dead sea into which the Jordan flows but can't get out and so it becomes the dead sea. We've got to have hearts that are being continually refreshed as it were by a constant flow of heavenly love as it flows out to others both in our attitude to God and in our attitude to our fellow human beings, to our fellow Christians. Paul mentions all the saints, we are family, we must be bound together in love and that love then must extend to others. It would be terrible if we were Christians who had no desire to seek the salvation of others, no pity for our terribly fractured world. Paul is speaking here in that bracketed passage of the chapter in the earlier part of the chapter about

[15 : 48] Jews and Gentiles together. Jews and Gentiles they didn't go together until they were knit together in Christ. That was the important thing. And we must remember that God's love is not soft, God never goes soft on sin, on judgment, his wrath is there as well as his love but it is tender and he's got pity on us. And it's interesting that the man whom God used to write these words about the surpassing wonder of love, about the beyond knowledge as it were of love or beyond our understanding of love is Paul. When he was known as Saul of Tarsus he was a hard man, a Pharisee who didn't have love in his heart and yet he was the one who when he met Christ was changed and he could write what we know as 1 Corinthians 13, that great poem of love and he writes here in the tenderest terms about Gentiles and Jews together, God's family, all the saints, all loved by God and Paul ministering to them.

You know friends, it grieves me terribly when I read or hear folk say about the preaching under which they were brought up, that it was stern and bending and loving. That is a terrible perversion of the gospel, a grave misunderstanding of God's grace for sinners such as we are.

And finally here Paul comes to one of the most astounding sayings in the whole Bible, another part here of verse 19 where he asks that we may know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now this is addressed in the plural so he's speaking to the church that we not just individuals also it affects us in that way too but as together we may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

As I mentioned this whole passage was one sentence when Paul wrote it and here he comes to the climax of that sentence and what a magnificent climax it is filled to the full measure of all the fullness of God. To grasp something of what that means we can look at the other instances where Paul uses this favorite word of his fullness. In the first chapter he mentions this word in verse 23 where it refers to Christ the fullness of him who fills all in all and that is referring to Jesus in the church when he gave himself for the church he fills the church with his fullness and his glory it lets you see what an important entity the church of Jesus Christ is it's his body and his life is in it and his love is in it with immeasurable greatness and then in chapter four of this book Paul is again speaking of the church and in verse 13 where he mentions again the church the body of Christ coming to full maturity and completeness that maturity and completeness which we see in Jesus himself majoring on the things that truly matter and not bothering with trifles but being mature fool wise people in the church and in Paul's letters to the Colossians in chapter one he uses this word fullness to refer to Jesus

Christ stressing his full divinity and the same thing is expressed very clearly in the second chapter of Colossians in verse nine where he uses the word fullness again all the fullness of deity dwells in Christ bodily no one can call himself a Christian if he does not acknowledge that Jesus is very God of very God so then what does it mean here for us this fullness which is mentioned the fullness of God it refers to all the saints as Paul mentions up above and we will only come to maturity and completeness to be the church and to be real Christians ourselves as the Lord wants us to be when we are filled with the love of God because it is the love of God that is the major subject of this and that is the fullness of God which the apostle is stressing for us here it's the key to understanding the nature of God and of our position in relation to him Jesus prayed to the Father that the love you that is the father have for me may be in them that is his disciples than that I myself may be in them that love is perfect that love is infinite and Paul prays that me we may be filled with it as it were until there is no more room in us it's wonderful but sadly as long as we remain in this world we'll fall short perfection eludes us but it's the goal for which we must strive with the Spirit's help so friends it's hugely important for us to believe right doctrine it's right for us to take worship seriously it's correct for us to attend to all the responsibilities we have as members of the church of which we are a part but all of that has to be as it were impregnated through and through with the love of God in

[25 : 03] Jesus Christ that's what brings us to maturity and which binds us together as Christian folk and which must characterize every one of us and all our dealings with one another it's the tie that binds and cannot be broken so may we by God's help be filled to the measure of all the fullness drawing on the inexhaustible resources and wonder of that love in Jesus Christ it's something surpassing wonderful and yet we can enjoy it to the full amen let's pray together our dear father in heaven how we rejoice in that great love expressed in christ who loved the church and gave himself for it who loved me and gave himself for me may I always be able to see and I love him dear father may that be the prayer for each of us and may our lives reflect it may our congregation reflect it may all our dealings with one another reflect it and may it be a potent witness to all when we come in contact with them that we are filled to the full measure of all the fullness of God his love in Christ amen