

The Christian Life

By David de Bruyn

In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.
(Eph 3:12-21)

What is the Christian life? The Christian life can be summed up in one word: ‘worship’. When a human being recognises their sin, and turns to Jesus Christ for salvation, a process begins of turning this former rebel and enemy into an adoring worshipper. A worshipper is one who sees the worth of God. He sees the value, the glory of God and treasures it. When someone treasures or loves God – He is worshipping. God has many means to accomplish this process and it will only be brought to perfection in heaven. But before then, God’s goal is that His children come to love and adore Him. When God’s people love Him – He is glorified. When God’s people love Him – they are satisfied. The human longing for happiness and God’s priority of His glory are both met in this one goal of making worshippers out of us.

Paul has spent three chapters giving fuel to the fire of our worship. He has been explaining chapter 1:3 – Blessed be God. For three chapters, it is as if he has been showing a slide show to an enthralled audience. ‘This is God’s election. This is the Son redeeming you with His own life. This is the Spirit permanently sealing you so you can never lose this blessing. This is the grace of God in saving you. This is the wisdom of God in bringing Jews and Gentiles together. This is God’s plan for the ages.

Paul has been laying down three chapters of theology before he gets down into three chapters of commandments. That’s because our walk is determined by our worship. Your beliefs determine your behaviour. Your idea of God will impact your response to God. His first words of chapter 4:1 are going to be ‘walk worthy’. In other words – walk in a manner fitting of this kind of God. Be a worshipper – one caught up with the worth of God, and now live in light of that. To that end, Paul writes down two prayers in these chapters. The one we looked at in chapter 1:15-23 was a prayer for illumination. The prayer we are about to look at now is perhaps his most beautiful prayer of all. It is the bridge between all he has been saying about how blessed God is for chapters 1-3, and the duties and commands that result from knowing God in chapters 4 to 6. In many ways, it is an incredibly compact and eloquent description of the whole Christian life. It is the way the whole thing works. It is the way we continually grow into being worshippers.

This is Paul's prayer. He has been demonstrating the great glory of God, and now he culminates in a prayer that his readers would become these kind of worshippers – these God-centred, Christ-aware, Spirit-filled people. This is the bridge between knowing about God's glory, and responding to it. When these verses, which describe the fundamentals of the Christian life, are working, the end result of loving God will be present, and all the commands of chapters 4 to 6 will flow out of this heart in love with God.

In verse 12 he speaks of the eternal purpose God always had, which we looked at last week – to vindicate His name. In Him, we have access and boldness to God through faith. In light of the boldness we have in God's ability to perform His plan, we must not lose heart, Paul says – this is all working out according to God's plan. And then in verses 14-15 he returns to his original thought, to pray God would bring about the spiritual growth of His readers so as to enter into the experience God purposed for His people – to be worshippers.

From verses 16 to 19, we see four parts of the Christian experience. We'll look at each one, but the thing to remember is that these are not entirely separate components. You cannot say, well, I'm doing well with part 2 and part 4, but part 1 and 3 are kind of weak. No, they are really interwoven links in a chain that leads up to being a worshipper. When you are starting to submit to stage 1, you will start to see stage 4.

So, Paul begins and ends this prayer with an appeal to God's power. He asks God to grant this spiritual growth out of the riches of His glory. And then he asks that his readers would submit to the foundational and fundamental point of becoming like Christ:

I. You Must Be Spirit-Controlled

“to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man”. The inner man refers to our souls, our immaterial spirit and soul, that which is not physical. “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” (2Co 4:16)

He is speaking about spiritual growth. And he says that this growth begins when we are strengthened with might by His Spirit. This is the start – when the Spirit fills us and controls us. We receive divine power to fulfil all that God wants of us. It begins with being filled with the Spirit. Understanding what this means is so important that we are not going to deal with it all here, we will look at it soon in detail. But this is what we must say: the link between what we are in Christ positionally and becoming what we are in Christ practically is being filled with the Spirit. It is the link between the blessings that are ours in Christ, and our subjective experience of them. It is the link between the positional ‘you in Christ’ to the practical ‘Christ in you’. *You in Christ* is what you are by God's grace through faith at salvation. Now by God grace through faith in sanctification (that is- being filled with the Spirit), you can flesh out *Christ in you*.

The main ministry of the Holy Spirit is the revealing of Jesus Christ. His main ministry is not conviction of sin, or the giving of gifts, or even regeneration. The Spirit's main ministry is always to reveal Jesus Christ.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (Joh 15:26)

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (Joh 16:13-14)

When you see Jesus Christ, you love Him. But the only way to see Him is to be filled with the Spirit. This is the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit – the revealing of Jesus Christ, so that people may know Him, love Him and thereby glorify Him and the Father.

How does this happen? When a believer adopts what is to be the default posture for a Christian – one of humility-faith. When we are humble before God, acknowledging our position before Him, and then turning to Him for grace, we will be controlled by the Spirit. When we see God's requirements, and want to do them, and know we cannot, we turn to Him for grace.

Being controlled by the Spirit is desiring to please God over myself. I want the fulfilment, the pleasure, the joy that comes from pleasing God, but I know I am a sheep, a slave with no resources of my own to please God. So I continually go before Him, in silent prayer, asking Him to give me grace, thanking Him, communing with Him, meditating on His Word, or as Jesus put it –abiding in him. This is the core, the first stage without which nothing else will happen. You will never please God without faith. You are filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit when you walk in God-dependent faith – seeking to please Him. When this is our state, it leads into something else: *“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith”*

II. You Must Be Son-Centred

Now at first glance we might ask – why would Paul pray that Christ dwell in their hearts? Weren't they Christians already? Doesn't Christ dwell inside all believers by His Spirit? The answer is, yes He does. So Paul was praying for something else. The Greek word here for 'dwell' literally means to 'house-down'. It means to dwell in a way that means they are at home. Paul says, I want you to be so desirous to please the Lord, that you are Spirit-controlled, so that Jesus Christ becomes the centre of your life. He is not a guest from time to time in the house of your life. He is the Lord, the ever Present Object of attention. This is why Paul says 'by faith'. When we are seeking to please God by humility and faith, the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us by faith. He increasingly takes up the position of central. The more I want to please Him, the more Spirit-controlled I am; the more He will be the focus of my actions, my motives, my desires. Every action can become one of seeking to please Christ. Jesus Himself said:

“And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.”(Joh 8:29)

When Christ is central and supreme – we are filling our design instructions. We are pleasing to the Father. We delight our Saviour. We are fully cooperative with the Spirit. Christ is the ruling Lord, not the occasional guest. He is the centre of attention. He is the centre of direction. He is the centre of communion. And in this environment, there is no tension between us and our Saviour. When there is no argument over who is central, over whose desires and purposes and will comes first, then Jesus is pleased to manifest Himself to us.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”(Joh 14:23)

Compare how God treated two Old Testament believers differently. We believe it was a pre-Bethlehem appearance of Jesus Christ that visited Abraham with two angels. He sat down with Abraham and actually ate a meal with him. He was comfortable with Abraham. Then, to the other believer, Lot, Jesus Himself would not go. He did not even visit personally; he sent the two angels. And when they came into Sodom, they also did not want to stay in Lot’s house, till he urged them repeatedly. What a contrast – one believer living for self, and God is not pleased to house-down. Another trying to follow God and please Him, and He sits down and relaxes with Abraham. When we seek to please the Lord by being controlled by the Spirit, He enables us to have an ever present Saviour. We will increasingly see Jesus Christ. He is here. He has a will for me now. He has desires now. He has direction, correction, encouragement, communion for me now. When I seek to abide, the Spirit enables me to have Christ dwelling with me by faith personally and presently. He is free to share Himself with me, because the fundamental issue has been settled – He is First. He is Lord. He is central. His will is more important. He is not a guest in my life – He is the Lord, He is my life. That leads to the third stage then: *“; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge”*

III. You Must Be Strengthened to Be Staggered

When Jesus Christ is more and more the centrepiece of our lives, the ruler of all, and the one we seek to please most - then He is pleased. And when God is pleased with someone, do you know what He loves to do? He loves to reveal Himself. He loves to reward the one who has pleased Him with more of Himself. That is not to suggest that God revealing Himself is achieved by works – it is all by grace. But it is grace upon grace (Exodus 33:13). We want to please Him by grace – Philippians 2:13. Then in humble faith, we seek His Spirit’s control. That is grace. Then by grace, we are able to see Christ as the central concern of our lives – the pleasure of pleasing Him. And as we do this by grace, then in His loving grace, He chooses to begin to reveal Himself to us. The idea behind this request is – as Christ is increasingly the centre of your life, you will be rooted and

grounded in love. That is, in His love for you, and in your love for Him and others. The whole atmosphere of your life becomes one of love.

He uses two ideas – rooted, and grounded. Rooted – in other words, like Psalm 1 speaks of the man like a tree planted by the rivers – our roots run deep into God’s Word and prayer, seeking to please Him as our sustenance. Grounded – like Jesus said in Matthew 7 that whoever hears His words and does them is like a house built upon the rocks, a firm foundation. The foundation of our lives and the source of our lives are pleasing to Christ.

Once the life is so filled with humility-faith – a self-sacrificing desire for God and others, then we are ready for His act of revealing all that His love means. A personal assurance. **Christ-centredness leads into Christ-awareness.** When the atmosphere of the life is Christ-centredness, He will be pleased to reveal Himself to us. Specifically, He will reveal His love for us. That, I believe, is what is meant by ‘the breadth, and length, and depth, and height’. It is the dimensions of His love. His love has breadth, length, depth and height. Its breadth is that it encompasses all of humanity, every human that has ever lived and ever will live. He loves all humans, from the unloveliest to the loveliest, from every tribe, nation, and race. Its length is that it goes to eternity past and will continue forevermore. He loved us before the foundation of the world, and if there is one thing the Psalmists repeat it is “*His steadfast love endures forever*”. Its depth is that it reached down into the deepest darkest depravity of the human heart; it reached out to the most evil of all of us. It stooped to the lowest condition to save us who were sinking into destruction. Its height is that it lifts us up into His very presence to be seated in the heavenly places with Him.

This kind of love is bigger than us. It is older than us, wiser than us. It is stronger than we are. God’s love is the ocean, and we are small bottles. So the prayer is that we would grow to be strengthened, to be able to grasp this love. With this atmosphere of seeking to please God being our root and our foundation, we would then be in a ready state to be able to grasp the kind of love God has for us. When God wants to floor a man, when He wants to completely overwhelm him, He begins to show him just a part of who He is. And this He does because He is pleased to do it. Notice Paul says – to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge. That’s a paradox. We are to know the love of Christ, but the love of Christ cannot be contained by the human mind or heart. It is more than we can ever think about.

The words of this hymn have always thrilled my heart:

*Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,
were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above,
would drain the ocean dry, nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from
sky to sky.*

*O Love of God, how rich and pure, how measureless and strong.
It shall forevermore endure, the saints’ and angels’ song.*

But make no mistake, knowing the love of God for us, being able to handle the weight of glory requires strength. It requires growth. We must first be continually filled with the

Spirit, so that we are continually Christ-centred, and thus, being saturated by desire to please Christ, we are in a ready state for this kind of Spirit-taught understanding of God's love.

Certainly we all know about God's love. But what Paul speaks of here is no head-knowledge agreement. It is something God gives to those who please Him. We tend to think we can wake up in the morning and just love God. Certainly it is simple to want to please God. But to know His love in this way requires we cooperate with the Spirit to be in that place of spiritual strength. We must be sanctified so as to enter into this blessed place of seeing Him. Thomas Brooks, one of the Puritans, put it this way:

"Full assurance is a rare blessing; it is a great and precious privilege, not indiscriminately bestowed. [This kind of] assurance is a mercy too good for most men's hearts...God will only give it to his best and dearest friends. [It] is the beauty and top of a Christian's glory in this life. It is usually attended with the strongest joy, with the sweetest comforts, and with the greatest peace. It is a crown that few wear. Assurance [of God's love] is meat for strong men; few babes, if any, are able to bear it, and digest it."

This is the high point of our Christian life, when we see God's love for us. Many Scriptures teach us that love is the high point, the end point which we are aiming for. "But the end [aim] of the commandment is love out of a pure heart," (1Ti 1:5)

"And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." (1Pe 4:8)

"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." (2Pe 1:5-7)

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." (1Co 13:13)

Jesus said the greatest commandment of all is to love God with all our heart soul and mind. And the thing to see is that our love is a response to His. "We love him, because he first loved us." (1Jo 4:19)

When we are Spirit-controlled, so as to be Son-Centred, we will be strengthened to be staggered with His love, and our love will flow back. At that point we are treasuring God like never before. It is here we are worshippers. And this leads us to the final section: *"that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God"*

IV. You Must Be Soul-Satisfied

When we, by the Holy Spirit see the glory of Christ, and that being communicated to us in love, there is simply no other way to put it – we will be satisfied. Jesus Christ is the fullness of God. *"Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all"*

(Eph 1:23) For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

(Col 1:19) "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col 2:9)

And when the Jesus chooses to allow us through the Holy Spirit to know His love in an experiential way, we will be filled up to the brim.

Our every need and desire will be met. We have the richest experience of God's presence; we have as much enjoyment of Him as we are capable of. We will be the consummation of what we were intended to be. And when God's creatures are absolutely satisfied with Him, it glorifies Him. There is nothing we can add to God. There is nothing we can do to improve God. The only way we can glorify God is if, when He fills us, we are gloriously satisfied. It displays to all who are watching – fill a human with themselves, they are not satisfied. Fill them with power, fill them with riches, fill them with possession, fill them with fame, fill them with pleasure – they are not satisfied. Fill them with God, and they are satisfied – and it glorifies God.

To be filled with God is a great thing; to be filled with the fulness of God is still greater; but to be filled with all the fullness of God, this is beyond our understanding. This is why, I believe for all eternity, we will in some ways, be growing spiritually. Yes, we will be perfected in the sense that we will have no sin. But what we are gleaning from this passage is the incredible strength necessary to begin to handle who God is. And I think through all eternity we will be learning of Him, growing in our love for Him, and learning more of His love for us. God will incrementally grow our vessels so He can pour more of Himself into us. Since He is infinite, this will never end.

And the more His creatures rejoice, the more He is glorified. That's why the chapter ends:

“to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever. Amen.” (Eph 3:21)

We get all the joy, and He gets all the glory. This is the wonderful plan of God. The more we submit to the Spirit, the more Son-Centred we will be. The more we are seeking to please Christ, the more our lives are grounded and rooted in pleasing Him, the more He is pleased to stagger us with the revelation of who he is, and how much He loves us. As this happens, we will be satisfied, and so glorify Him. And then, the cycle will continue. The more satisfied we are, the more we will submit to the Spirit so that this may continue.

Listen to what Jonathan Edwards wrote: “Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having [dismounted] from my horse in a [private] place, ... to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared [inexpressibly] excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception ... which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects.

Or you can read what D.L. Moody wrote: “ One day in New York - oh what a day! - I cannot describe it; I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God revealed himself to me, and I had such an

experience of his love that I asked him to stay His hand. I went preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths; and yet hundreds were converted.”

Perhaps someone objects – it’s impossible, I can’t do it. I am not able to reach this place. Only some super-saints have got there. To that, The Bible answers:

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”(Eph 3:20)

Think about that. If the verse had said, “Now unto him that is able to do that we ask,” – it would be great.

If the verse had said, “Now unto him that is able to do that we ask or think,” – it would be better. God could even do the things we imagined.

If the verse had said, “Now unto him that is able to do all that we ask or think,” – it would be wonderful. He is able to do our every request and even thought.

If the verse had said, “Now unto him that is able to do above that we ask or think,” – it would be incredible – He could do more than we could ever ask or imagine.

If the verse had said, “Now unto him that is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think,” – it would be absolutely stupendous. God can do far more than all that we could ever imagine. But the verse doesn’t say that. It says:

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,”

God is able to do superabundantly more than your greatest, wildest dreams or imagination. Where your finite mind runs out of power to imagine, God hasn’t even begun. And this power is not removed from us; it is the power that works in us. The Bible is saying – this experience of loving and treasuring God, though it be the highest experience a human can have, is possible for every believer because it is this kind of power that will accomplish it.

To the degree that you co-operate with this power, is the degree to which you will experience this awesome knowledge of His love and be the worshipper you were created to be.
