

THE MYSTERIOUS INNER BEING, EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Awed By God #7

◆Intro: I wonder if you have ever found yourself with time on your hands, in stillness. I mean, you're alone in the house, but you left your smart phone in your friend's car. So you sit down, and you don't know what to do with yourself. Or suppose the internet isn't working so you can't page aimlessly through Facebook reading infinite and sometimes meaningless comments and quips. You would turn off your mind with Candy Crush, or a thousand other games that only the human species invent but, once again, you don't have your phone. It's a disquieting moment. Know the feeling? For some, the phone has become our drug of choice and we feel lost without it. At other times we choose other drugs, or habits, or addictions – anything to fill the emptiness or to avoid emptiness.

◆Oh we chose other drugs as well: an unrelenting softball schedule, a regimen of concert performances, extreme sports, changing fashion. I have good news for us.

◆**My soul has a hole and it's shaped like God.** Augustine said that back in the 5th Century. Actually he called it a God-shaped vacuum. It's good news because at least we know then what's missing!! That would mean then that my spirit will always be restless until I rest in God. G.K.

Chesterton was describing the same thing when he said that no man has ever knocked on the door of a prostitute who wasn't looking for God.

◆In our text, Paul is praying for their souls and that the emptiness would actually be filled up. Let me show you. Verse 14 says “For this reason I kneel before the Father...” What reason? There are three “so that” (ὡς) clauses in the original of 16, 18, and 19 that don't stand out so much in the english.

◆Verse 16 says literally: “(I pray) so that...he may strengthen you with power in your inner being (soul).”

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◆Verse 18: “(I pray) so that...you may have the power...to grasp the...love of Christ.

◆Verse 19: “(I pray) so that you may be filled will all the filling of God.

◆Lets look at all three of these that Paul prays for.

◆**1.** The first thing Paul prays (v16) is that they will grow spiritually, in their inner being. And what we learn from this is that **When it comes to my soul I can grow farther than where I am right now.** What Paul wants us to see, is that there is more to this life with God than we imagine.

Sometimes folks think, for example, that making a decision to accept Christ, or professing faith, getting baptized, or joining a church is a sort of final step. There then. That base has been tagged. Now I just go on being a regular person who once said he or she was a believer in Jesus.

Guess what. That’s not all God wants with you or me. In reality *becoming Christ’s is more like arriving at the foot of a great trail head that leads off into miles of adventurous terrain!* The whole route is ahead of us yet!

What hiker would stand around at the trail head with his cool boots, her flashing collapsable hiking sticks, and not set out?

◆Note verse 17: “that Christ may dwell in your hearts.” There are several similar words for “dwell” from the same root in Paul’s language. One is *paroikeo*. *Oikos* is “house”. This one means to “house oneself” or to “hang out”. If your son said, “Hey Dad, can Steve crash here for the night and go home in the morning?” he would use *paraoikeo*: to dwell, but temporarily. The other is *katoikeo*. This one means to take up residence. If your son said, “Hey Dad, can Steve move in with us?” he would use *katoikeo*. That’s what Paul uses here. He’s praying that God grows our soul until Jesus is fully moved in; more than a guest, but a resident.

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◆ So that's why I say, when it comes to spiritual growth, we always have farther to go. Christians are a people *on the way*. If you asked me if I've been "converted" I'd say, no. I'm being converted. I really like how our ancestors who wrote the Heidelberg Catechism talk about conversion: a dying away of the old self and a coming to life of the new self. Some folks speak of a one-time experience as conversion, but who of us can say our life is fully converted to the ways of God? Every Christian sooner or later needs to realize that just as their bodies grow, so can and should their spirit.

◆ There is famous story called *My Heart, Christ's Home* that imagines Jesus comes to live in the writer's heart as though it were a house. The narrator welcomes Jesus to the living room, the kitchen. Even gives him his own room. But there are doors he keeps locked shut. Jesus lives there in his heart-house a while, but there is are notable odors and odd sounds coming from the locked rooms. Jesus offers to clean the rooms out. Full health doesn't come to the house until the owner repents, and invites Jesus into every room to create order and beauty out of any chaos there.

◆ What rooms of your life have you kept locked? Some folks accept the salvation from their sins that Paul talked about in chapter 2. The grace, the promise of heaven. Yeah! Cool! Thanks you, God. But still don't invite God into how they parent or discipline their children. Some folks worship Jesus weekly, but it hasn't occurred to them to invite Jesus into their marriage, which isn't going very well. Maybe for you it's what you do with your time. Or what you do with your money. Maybe it's how you view your parents. Or maybe it's the room that holds you life goals. If Jesus would physically appear

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today at your house and say he'd like to help clean out a room with you, which one would it be? (I'm going to give us a minute of silence to begin meditating on this before we move on...)

◆2. Ok, the second thing Paul's prayer for the Ephesians moves to is in verse 18, namely that they will gain a greater grasp of the size of God's love. And what we learn is that **When it comes to my soul, Christ's love for me is greater than I think it is right now.** We need to dwell a moment on the size of God's love in Christ, because it is in the depth and breath of love that we become secure.

◆For example, if a teen feels genuinely loved at home, he is more unlikely to try all manner of questionable things away from home in order to fit in and be accepted. Now, we are all susceptible to sin. But where one feels strongly loved, one is always stronger than she otherwise would be. Likewise as you and I become more aware of God's love, we too are more secure. In my experience, the people most convinced of God's love are the people most giving away to others. They are the ones who venture to foreign lands. They are the ones who spend their money and their time off on other people's needs. They are the ones who go without in order to share. Who would rather take blame than see a friend hurt. And so forth. It comes from security in God's love.

◆“How deep is your love?” we might ask of God? What does his word say?

◆*“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion*

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on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;" Psalms 103:11-13, NIV.

◆ How high are the heavens? Well, the moon is over 230,000 miles away. The sun is 93 million miles away. The nearest star is 4.3 lightyears away. That's a lotta love right there! How far is the east from the west? Well the earth is almost 25,000 miles around, so if you headed north from the south pole, after about 13,500 miles you'd reach the north pole, but if you continued you'd be going south, wouldn't you. So scriptures don't say "as far as the north is from the south. It says, "as far as the east is from the west. If you start anywhere and head west, you never wind up heading east, do you? That's how wide God's love, and how far he removes our sins. That's a lotta love right there! Ps 103:17 says that "from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him." Paul spoke earlier in this letter about God's love.

◆ "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus," Ephesians 2:4-6, NIV.

◆ In our text he points out that everything comes from God (v15, you, me, everyone, every name) and that his power is immeasurably more (can't be measured) than we can imagine (v20). Sometimes the best way to see what God's love is like is to witness a mirror of it in the people he made, even if it's but a small sampling.

◆ Bombardier Robert Key died in WW2 when a grenade he was holding exploded. An army report blamed him for "showing off" with the grenade in the recaptured French town of Annezin in September

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1944. His family were apparently ashamed because his service record cited “foolish” behavior for his death, and they refused to talk about him for 65 years. But when the town’s mayor traced Robert’s family in Coventry, England in 2008, to ask permission to name a road after Robert, the truth began to emerge. The family discovered that Robert had in fact snatched the grenade from a large group of children he’d found playing with it. When one boy pulled out the pin, Bombardier Key seized the grenade and fled away, clutching the grenade to his stomach to protect the children when it exploded. To this day, Robert remains a legend in the town of Annezin.

◆ That I think is something like the love of God for you and me. It is so wide that it includes Jews and Gentiles (ch.2). It is so long that it started before the creation of the world (1:4) and lasts longer than solar system. It is so deep that he’d rather die himself than let us die even though we are mere kids and he’s the adult. It is so high that he has given believers a privileged place in the heavenly realms, a throne of sorts next to his own (2:6-7), even though we were playing in gutter of our immoral deeds. You might sometimes wonder if it’s worth it to be a Christian...well...

◆ *“That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are quite small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever!” 2 Corinthians 4:16, 17, NLT.*

◆ I want you to know friends, that for those who belong to Jesus, the best is always yet to come. There is always more of his love to experience. After a million years in the next life we will not have been to all the beautiful places he’s made, or written out all the beautiful music he inspires, or met

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all the beautiful people he's saved, or heard all the moving stories of what he's done. We will not have found every mountain stream or plumbed every ocean floor for his miraculous creatures. Every beauty is a reminder of the true God who created it out of love.

◆**3.** Ok, third thing Paul prays for. This one is in verse 19: he prays that they (and we) may be filled with all the filling of God. From this we learn, I think, **that God is not satisfied until his love has finished it's work in us.** His intention is that our lives be fruit-full.

◆*“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. ” John 15:8-16, NIV.*

◆**A.** Now what does it mean to produce fruit. This, I think, many get wrong. Let me tell a story. There was a wealthy business owner who worked endless hours and built large companies that produced around the clock. He was on vacation in a southern country and disturbed to see a

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fisherman lazily sitting beside his boat. Their conversation went something like this:

◆“Why aren’t you out fishing?”

◆“I’ve caught enough fish for today.”

◆“Why not continue to catch more?”

◆“What would I do with them?”

◆“Well, you’d sell them and earn more money and then you could buy a better boat and go deeper in the sea and catch even more and be wealthy.”

◆“And then what would I do?”

◆“Why, you could sit and enjoy life!”

◆“What do you think I’m doing?”

◆No friends, to be filled with God and produce fruit is not to be busy and amassing wealth. To be filled with God is to be filled with his love. And to be filled with his love requires time and attention to your soul.

◆“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” Mark 8:34-36, NIV.

◆This is why Christians for thousands of years have practiced such spiritual disciplines as silence, meditation on God’s word, stillness, sabbath rest, worship, prayer. (The things we teach in Class 201, Discovering Spiritual Maturity.) I challenge you to make room in your life for such things. It takes time, and thought to be thought-full with other people. It take periods of peace to be a calm and peace-full person on the job. It take the practice of rejoicing to be joy-full in your home. It take time with

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God to become godly. These are things of the soul. The soul is the place we feel peace, and meaning, and reason for life. The soul is part of us that genuinely delights in goodness. The soul is that part of us that gets “touched” by a good story, or the pain of another person. To be filled with the measure of the fullness of God, we must pay attention to our souls.

◆ **Conclusion:** During my college years I had a suite mate that must have had his share of demons on the inside. He rarely talked. Rarely acknowledged your presence. Frequently came in drunk. But most notably, never was he in his dorm room that the stereo was not on and turned all the way up. When he left the room others of us would enter his room and turn off the stereo. When he came in at night, say, one or two o'clock, on went the stereo. It was as if silence was his enemy. I often wondered what that was all about. My guess is that, like the rest of us, he was trying to fill the emptiness in his soul with whatever he could. What are you trying?

◆ Inside of every man is a God-shaped vacuum. Our souls are restless until we rest in him.