"A Prayer for the Church" (Part Three)
Ephesians 3:19
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Introduction:
1. We live in a time of material prosperity and spiritual poverty. Most of us fall sadly short of how our Father in heaven wants us to live. We are too easily distracted from the eternal and the spiritual. We are caught up in trivial concerns and the tyranny of the urgent. We move quickly but aimlessly. We like the pleasant tingle of a refreshing drink, but do we go to the Water of life and drink? We are enamored with neon lights, but do we look at the Light of the world? We crave pulsating beat of contemporary music, but do we listen to the sound of His voice? What has happened to us? We must rebuild the spiritual dimension of our lives before the material eats us alive! And what of our children? Most parents are blissfully unaware of how their children indulge in sexual immorality, drugs and alcohol. However, if you have spiritual discernment, you can see the spiritual "tombstones in their eyes".
2. True Christianity offers us a better and different way of life. The Lord Jesus Christ calls us to seek what has true value and significance (Mt 6:19-21,24, 31-33). God has a better way for his people to live. The apostle prays that we might know God's way.
3. We have already considered the first two requests of this prayer. Since true Christianity is personal, the first request seeks an increasing experience with Christ by the Spirit. This leads to the second request for spiritual strength to grasp and know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Now Paul boldly prays for something higher—that the saints might "be filled to all the fullness of God." Let's look at this request together.

Exposition:
I. Some preliminary observations about being "filled to all the fullness of God"
A. About the translation
1. The Greek language uses a highly developed case system for its nouns, pronouns, adjectives and participles. (Most grammarians see five cases: nominative, vocative, genitive, dative, and accusative.) The case of a word determines its relationship to other words in the sentence.
2. In this third request, Paul prays that believers might be filled "to all the fullness of God." The word God is in the genitive case. The question is whether this is an objective genitive (the fullness that God gives) or a subjective genitive (the fullness that fills God). It seems best to take it as a subjective genitive, because of the sequence of the ideas in the passage and the preposition used, which should not be translated as "with" (as the KJV and NKJV incorrectly translate) but as "to" (as the NASV and NIV translate). Paul, therefore, is praying that believers might be filled with the perfection that fills God himself. Certainly, this is the highest level to which those in Christ may climb!
B. Regretfully, the KJV/NKJV mistranslations lend support to some false doctrines that are far removed from the teaching of the Scriptures. It may be wise to mention these errors for the purpose of avoiding them.
1. Mysticism talks about the possibility of absorbed into or of becoming one with God in nature. It claims you can lose your personality and individuality and become one with the eternal and divine.

2. Pantheism claims that "god" is in everything or that everything is "god". This is really just another way of saying that everything is not god, because if everything is the same, then there is no gradation of being.

3. Gnosticism asserts there are various levels between the spiritual and the material and that by knowledge we can ascend from one level to another, eventually becoming one with the spiritual or "God".

Answer: All such teachings are far removed from the Bible, regardless of whatever "God" or "Jesus" language they use. Throughout the Bible God reveals himself as infinite, eternal, triune spirit, self-sufficient and separate from his creation. There is always the "I-you" distinction between the Creator and what he created.

II. The meaning of being "filled to all the fullness of God"

Comment: If we are to be filled to all the fullness of God, what does that mean? Our answer comes from theology and the general teaching of the New Testament Scriptures.

A. In the doctrine of theology, we discern that God has two kinds of attributes: those that are incommunicable or natural (what belongs only to the divine nature) and communicable or moral (what the creature may receive in likeness to God).

1. Some of God's attributes or characteristics belong to him alone. Only God is infinite, eternal, unchangeable and self-sufficient spirit.

2. Other of God's attributes tell what he is, but may to some degree also belong to his creatures. These are such things are wisdom, power, holiness, justice, patience and goodness.

Example: God is holy, but he also commands us to be holy (1 Pt 1:15-16). The Holy Spirit produces fruit that conforms to God's character (Gal 5:22-23).

Apply: How do we attain this likeness to God, so that we are being filled to the fullness of God? We reach it by Christ-dwelling in the heart as we are strengthened with power to know and grasp the love of Christ.

B. The New Testament Scriptures present this pattern of how we become like God.

1. Likeness comes as a result of God' eternal purpose. Rm 8:29
2. Likeness comes through our union with Christ. Col 1:19; 2:3,9-10
3. Likeness comes as God lives in his people. Jn 14:23
4. Likeness comes through prayer. Eph 3:19
5. Likeness comes by the work of the ministry. Eph 4:11-13

Apply: How are you showing the moral character of God on a daily basis?

III. The experience of being "filled to all the fullness of God"

A. Since Christ has the fullness of God, we progress toward fullness through our union with Christ. Jn 1:16

1. An illustration — Christ is the vine; we are the branches (Jn 15:5). His life flows into us, so that we bear for God.

2. This likeness to God develops as we live by faith in Christ.

Illustration: If you take a balloon and blow into it, you can say that it is full of air. But if you blow into it again, the balloon increases in size, but it is still full of air.

B. Practically, this experience will produce radical changes in our way of life.

1. Our world and life view will be an image of God's. Rm 12:1-2

Illustration: Stephen (Ac 7:60) and Paul (Ac 20:22-24).

2. We will become zealous for the work of the Lord. 1 Cor 15:58
3. We will be satisfied. Jn 7:37-39

Apply: How much do we know of being filled to all the fullness of God? Let's not dismiss this question without serious consideration. If we say we want to live forever with God, do we want God's character transforming our lives?