

## SERMON NOTES EPHESIANS 3:14-21 FILLED WITH GOD

### INTRODUCTION

We think of Paul as the great man for doctrine and for ethics, but he was also a great man of prayer. Donald Carson points out that there are 42 prayers in the 13 letters written by Paul found in our New Testament. Some of these are short prayers, often spontaneous thanksgivings or doxologies that spring from the great truths he is discussing, but there are also some lengthy prayers such as the one found in chapter 1 of Ephesians. This prayer in chapter 3, which takes up eight verses, is one of his most loved and frequently quoted.

### HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH GOD? (verses 14,15)

#### 1. With Reverence (verse 14)

The Jews were accustomed to stand for prayer. In the Scriptures kneeling indicated either a very special event or an unusual passion. Here Paul speaks of *bowing his knees* because of the wonder of the doctrine he has been explaining to the church in Ephesus. Kent Hughes comments, "How beautiful to see a man go to his knees because of God's Word."

#### 2. With Submission (verse 15)

The fact that every family in heaven and on earth is named from the Father implies his sovereign authority. "*Every family*" could be translated, as it is in the NIV, by "*the whole family*." Paul is speaking of the unity of all believers, what is called in the ancient creed "the communion of the saints."

### WHAT SHOULD WE SEEK FROM GOD? (verses 16-19)

There are three requests here:

#### 1. To be Strengthened and Indwelt by Christ. (verses 16, 17a)

There appear to be two requests here – one for strengthening and one for indwelling - however they are in essence the same request. We are strengthened by the Holy Spirit as we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He cannot strengthen us unless he indwells us, and he will not indwell us without strengthening us. In these things we never "arrive." We always need strengthening; we never achieve a sufficient degree of spiritual strength that enables us to go it alone. Likewise we never obtain so much of Christ that we need no more.

#### 2. To Know and Experience the Love of Christ. (verses 17b-19a)

Paul mixes his metaphors here. We are to be rooted, a horticultural image, and built up, an architectural image, in the love of Christ. What the two metaphors have in common is the idea of depth and firmness, of permanence and durability. Paul speaks about the "*the breadth and length and height and depth*" of the love of Christ. John Stott writes that, "the love of Christ is 'broad' enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jews and Gentiles who have been mentioned in previous verses), 'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and 'high' enough to exalt him to heaven."

#### 3. To Experience the Fullness of God (verse 19b)

Paul gives as his climactic request, "*that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*." This will never happen. A finite person, a finite church, can never be filled with the fullness of God. But anything less that this objective is unworthy of any Christian.

### WHO IS GOD? (verses 20,21)

Whatever our situation, whatever our needs: God is able. Indeed, he is able "*to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think*." Let us draw near to this God. Let us be persistent in prayer. Let us strive after godliness. And God the Father will be glorified "*in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations*."