

WHO AM I?

Ephesians



FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 3:14-21

Reading the New Testament, I see that Christianity is many things. But one thing it isn't: a weekend option between soccer practices.

I am not against soccer practices or weekend pastimes. But I do believe that real Christianity is a compelling power so great it gets us beyond such small calculations. The early Christians were caught up into something from beyond this world, something gloriously all-encompassing. Real Christianity is massive. But is that our Christianity?

Christian conversion is not God sprinkling his pixie-dust blessing on our typical routines. It is a paradigm shift for the whole of our lives, with new categories and new capacities. We see this throughout the New Testament.

Ephesians 3:14–19 is one representative sample. Paul prays three requests for all Christians everywhere:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith — that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.¹

OPEN IT

1. **At this point of your life, what takes up the majority of your time? Are you happy about that or would you like to change it?**

READ IT

Ephesians 3:14-21

¹Ray Ortland, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/sunday-soccer-and-small-christianity>

9. What does Paul pray for? How would you summarize the main themes of his prayer?

Experiencing God

It is not easy for frail human beings when the risen Christ brings into our tiny hearts a new sense that he is real and wonderful beyond all this world can offer. Picture it this way: if I drop a piece of white-hot nuclear fuel into a paper bag, that paper bag needs to be strengthened to hold that fuel.

As Dwight Moody (1837–1899) was struggling with his own personal shortcomings, God met him one day in New York. He later wrote, “I can only say God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand.” Christ does not make our lives easier. He makes our lives wonderfully harder as he cares for us with a love so great that we need strength to endure him.²

10. Describe a time when you were overwhelmed by an experience of the love of Christ. What keeps you from living out of a daily experience of the love of Christ? Why do you think it is so important to Paul that we experience at the deepest level the love of Christ?

11. Let’s imagine that Paul’s prayer was answered in your life. What might that look like?

² Ray Ortlund, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/sunday-soccer-and-small-christianity>

God in Us

Francis Foulkes, a theologian and commentator, expresses the heart of Ephesians 3:19 well: “He [Paul] thus prays ultimately that they may receive not any attribute of God, or any gift of his, not love, not knowledge, not strength, alone or in combination—but no less than the very highest he can pray for, the full indwelling of God. . . . Of course the eternal God can never be limited to the capacity of any one, or all, of his sinful creatures; at the same time Paul does not want to pray for anything less than that God’s people may be filled to the very fullest of himself that he seeks to bring into their lives” (The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1989, p. 114). The goal of every Christian is to be filled completely with God, so that His character, His attributes, and His love define our existence.

The fullness of God refers to the totality of who God is. In one sense, the absolute fullness of God is unknowable for finite creatures. However, in His grace, God chooses to communicate with His creatures, offering them new life in Christ, indwelling them by the Holy Spirit, and ultimately filling them with His fullness. A powerful image from C. S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters* illustrates this well. In this fictional book, an elder demon is writing to his young nephew, attempting to explain God’s grand plan for humankind: “One must face the fact that all the talk about His [God’s] love for men, and His service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda, but an appalling truth. He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself—creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His” (HarperCollins Pub., 1996, p. 38).

If you are a Christian, you can ask God to fill you with His fullness and have faith that “He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, NASB). If you are not a Christian, Jesus invites you to a new relationship with God today. Why wait?³

12. Is it possible for the fullness of God’s love to fill us completely? Why or Why not? What would that look like in your life? In your neighborhood?

13. What are some examples of the height of God’s love? Depth? Length? Width? Read these passages for more ideas:

Psalm 103:11-12

Micah 7:19

Jeremiah 31:3

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/fullness-of-God.html>

Our Great God

Benedictions express anticipation for the blessings only God can give. We often confuse them with prayers or doxologies, but they are unique.

*With a prayer, we ask for what only God can do: “Father in heaven, may your kingdom come.”

*With a doxology, we give the glory only God is due: “Now to him be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

*With a benediction, we expect what only God can give: “May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ” (2 Thess. 3:5).

Benedictions give us God-sized expectations for our future. When you look out on your life’s horizon, what do you expect that God might do for you? What do you expect he can do for you? What do you think he wants to do for you? When we hear a biblically rooted benediction, we hear the gracious future that God alone can open up for us.

They teach us to anticipate God’s promises of a transformed heart and life (Heb. 13:20–21). They teach us to seek for our hearts to be comforted and established in every good word and work (2 Thess. 2:16–17). They teach us to live, every step, under the grace of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:21). Benedictions remind us that what we need most can only come from God.⁴

Ephesians 3:20,21 is a doxology with a sort of prayerful benediction that God would be at work in us!

14. In this doxology, what does Paul teach us about God?

15. Why is this praise significant and appropriate for Paul’s prayer in vv. 14-19?

⁴ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-reasons-benedictions-church/>

16. Does this feel like the climax of the letter so far? Why or why not?

17. What does Paul want us to understand is essential to becoming mature in the faith?