

"Googling God's Plan For His Church—and You!" (A Review and Overview of Ephesians).



Do you ever wonder what God is up to in the world? Oh there are days we ask that question. Like when we are stuck in traffic on our way to a really important appointment. Or when we are wrestling with dilemmas like a life-threatening illness or injustice at work or students who are making fun of us at school. And that is a good question to ask in those times. A *very good* question to ask. In fact, the psalms encourage us to ask God what He is up to when we are facing really tough times (e.g. Psalm 73).

But I am not just talking about difficult times. I am talking about *all* the time. What is God up to? Is He simply sitting on His throne, waiting to send Jesus back to earth? Is He occupied with all the disasters going on in the world (like a fireman putting out fires)? Is He busy sorting through all of our prayer requests? Just before He died and rose again, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to “prepare a place” for His disciples. Does that mean that He has been spending the last 2,000 years building mansions all over the hilltops of heaven? What exactly is God *up to*?

I really can’t answer that question in the sense that I can tell you where God is at this very moment and precisely what He is doing. The reason is that God is infinite. Therefore, He is not confined by space or even time. And yet, He has graciously revealed to us not only that He *exists*—but in a real sense *what He is up to in this world and in our lives*.

But we still have not answered our question, have we? If I were to ask you what you think God is up to, I would likely hear a variety of answers. And the reason for that is because we can point to different passages in the Scripture that describe the acts and works of God. Yet, all these activities of God are a *part* of something even bigger. And that is where we struggle. We see God at work—and we see different aspects of His work. But we don’t necessarily see *where it all fits together*.

Example: When our kids were younger, they could recognize our church building when we drove by it, but they didn’t know how to get here (until we taught them to observe

the way we drove to church each week). But even if they knew how to get here, they didn't necessarily know that Cornerstone was in the community of Roseville. Or where Roseville was in relation to other communities that they had heard about—such as Warren or Fraser or Eastpointe or Detroit. And they certainly didn't know where it was in relation to other regions or states—or the rest of the world. They *lacked* a big picture perspective. That is until **Google Earth** came along. Google Earth is a free internet program that allows you to see your own house in relation to the rest of the world. It is a massive data base of satellite pictures of the planet. And it provides a wonderful tool to help us see the big picture of how all the countries and continents of the earth fit together. **[Go through slides 1-12].**

Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was something like this that would help us see the big picture of **what God is doing** in the world—and how it all fits together? You say: That's what the Bible does. But think with me for a moment. The Bible is a pretty big book. Most of us know how it starts in Genesis and how it ends in the Revelation of Jesus Christ—and we know that there are a lot of stories and commands and prophecies and even poetry contained in Genesis and Revelation and the other 64 books in-between. But we struggle to see *how it all fits together*. *Wouldn't it be great if there was a Google Bible?!* Well guess what? There is! God has given you a way of seeing how His plan fits together—not just in eternity, but *here and now*. It's called the book of Ephesians. God inspired Paul to write it so that we would more and more understand what *He* is up to, where *you and I* fit in, and what *we* are to be doing right now on earth.

But we have a bit of a challenge. It has been seven months since we last looked at Ephesians (April 2). So I thought it would be good to come back and just do a flyover of the book. Here's my thinking behind this. If Ephesians is an overview of God's big plan laid out in the Bible—why not do an *overview* of the overview? We'll call it: **Google Ephesians!** But before we get into this for the next 25 minutes—let's ask God to help us. Because as Paul himself prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19, if God doesn't open our eyes, all our Googling will be of little benefit. **[Pray Ephesians 1:17-19 with congregation following along with their Bibles open].**

How should we try to *google* Ephesians? Perhaps the most obvious way is to simply breakdown the book into its two main parts. There is a very obvious division between chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. Chapters 1-3 are a celebration of all that God has done for His people in reconciling them to Himself and each other.

Chapters 4-6 challenge us to come to grips with this new identity and purpose we have in Christ and to live *every day* and *everywhere* in light of it—with other believers, in your family, and where you work. In short, chapters 1-3 deal with **doctrine** and chapters 4-6 deal with **practice**. To put it another way, chapters 1-3 deal with the **what** and the **why** of the Gospel—while chapters 4-6 deal with the **how**—specifically *how you are to live all this out*. A good way of remembering these two emphases and how they fit together is with the numbers 1 and 4. Chapter 1, verse 4 summarizes **what** God has done for you: “For he (God) **chose us in him** (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” Chapter 4 and verse 1 summarizes **how** you are to live this out: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to **live a life worthy of the calling** you have received.” The word, “then” or “therefore” acts as a pivot upon which Paul's argument

turns. He is saying: *“Therefore, in light of all that God has done for you, live out who you are!”*

That is a look at Ephesians from outer space. It gives you a big picture not only of Ephesians—but summarizes the whole message of the Bible. But that is not all there is to googling. You will want to come down closer to earth and get a sharper focus. At the same time, you don’t want to get *so close* that you forget how everything is all connected.

Illustration: Let me illustrate what I mean. When the kids were little, we lived in Indiana. Two or three times a year we would take a trip to their grandparents who lived in Ohio. Now they knew that their grandparents lived in Ohio, but beyond that, Ohio was an abstraction. Often when we passed the state line they would be sleeping. But when they would wake up, the first thing they would ask is: Where are we? And I would say: Ohio. And the next thing out of their mouths was: *Where is Grandpa and Grandma Lesh’s house?* They had no specificity to their knowledge. If you would have asked them to define the meaning of Ohio, you would have found this definition in their mental dictionaries: **“Ohio—A place where grandparents live.”** They knew we lived on a round planet called earth. They knew that somewhere on our planet was a place called Ohio where grandparents live. But they had no idea where it was in relation to Indiana, how far away it was, and how big it was. And they definitely did not know that a second definition of Ohio is a place where people each year try to play football—but usually give up trying by late November. My kids could not appreciate “Ohio” until they were able to see it and comprehend it on a map—or until *Google Earth* came along.

I think believers have the same problem. We treat Scripture as though it was a destination for solving today’s current problem. Give me a promise so I won’t worry about possibly losing my job. But we still don’t see the big picture. And we don’t see how it all connects together. And so while we may be comforted that we are closer to the destination, we miss the joy of seeing what God is doing on the journey! That is why it is so important to google the Bible.

Speaking of googling the Bible, another way to do that is to look for key words or concepts that the writer repeats throughout a book. One word that I have recently noticed while reading Ephesians is the word, **“fill.”** I want us to google Ephesians using this particular word for a few minutes because I think it will help you to better understand what God is up to right now in your life—and how you need to respond.

The first time this word occurs in Ephesians is in 1:23. But in order to appreciate its meaning, we need to back up to verse 15 where Paul begins a prayer for his readers in Ephesus and beyond:

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his

*mighty strength,*²⁰ *which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,*²¹ *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*²² *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,*²³ *which is his body, the **fullness** of him who **fills everything** in every way.*

The context here is pretty straightforward. Paul is praying for the Ephesians that God will give them **google** eyes. Eyes that will be able to see the big picture of all that Paul has been praising the triune God for in verses 3-14. He is praying—God give them eyes to see beyond what is immediately in front of them to who you are and all that you are doing in the world. And then, even as Paul is pleading with God to give them eyes to see what God is doing, He describes what he wants them to see in the concluding part of his prayer. And what is it that Paul wanted them and wants you and me to see? The ascended Lord Jesus, enthroned in heaven, *ruling over all things!*

Can *you* see that? Is that where Jesus is **now**? I know that is where He will be one day—but now?! With all the persecution going on in China, all the unrest in the Middle East, and all the uncertainty about rogue nations and nuclear proliferation?! Is Jesus on the throne while jobs are disappearing in Michigan and morality is vanishing in our leaders—both political *and spiritual*?! Oh come on Paul—surely not?

Do you know what Paul would say? He'd say come closer to me. What is wrapped around my wrists? Chains. Whose chains? Rome's chains? No! Christ's chains! (c.f. Phil. 1:13: "I am in chains for Christ").

Paul is praying to a Sovereign, Savior-King. And in verse 22, he uses unmistakable language to drive home this very point. He states that God has placed *all things under Christ's feet*. Does that sound familiar? It is the language of dominion. The psalmist, David, in referring back to Genesis 1 and God's assigning dominion to man to rule over the rest of creation uses similar terminology in Psalm 8:4-6: **[Slide 13]**

*⁴ What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put **everything under his feet**.*

Question: How did we get to Christ ruling over creation when that task was originally assigned to man? Good question. But before we can answer that—read the rest of verse 22 and 23:

*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,*²³ *which is his body, the **fullness** of him who **fills everything** in every way.* There is that word, "**fill**." And again notice the context of where it is used here. It is

couched in the language of Genesis 1 and God's creation mandate to Adam and Eve. So let's look at those verses in Genesis 1:26-28: [Slide 14]

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them **rule** over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (remember how David referred to this in Psalm 8?)²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; **fill** the earth and **subdue** it. **Rule** over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

In verse 26, the King of the Universe is talking with his heavenly court *about man*. But in verse 28, He is speaking directly *to man*. We tend to remember the "be fruitful and multiply" part of this command. And we may chuckle to ourselves and say: Well that's one thing we got right. There's over 6 billion people on the planet! But the word, *fill* isn't just a term for populating the earth. It goes more directly with the commands that follow rather than the ones that precede it. *Filling* must be seen in connection with man *subduing* the earth (that is bringing it into subjection for the good of creation and for man himself). And that is a function of ruling. The purpose of man's ruling goes back to verse 26. It is a part of man's being in the *image of God*. The invisible ruler of the universe created man in His image to visibly reflect His rule through man. To fill the earth with the reflection of his glorious rule.

[**Illustration** of ancient near eastern rulers who constructed statues of themselves to remind subjects throughout their far flung empires to behave or else the ruler would show up with his armies and turn their cities into parking lots!]

So what happened to man? He still rules. But when he sinned against God by listening to Satan, his rule was perverted. Rather than ruling on God's behalf, man went to war *against* God. And ever since he has been in conflict with himself and everyone else. You see this in broken friendships, estranged marriages, and warring nations.

So what is Paul's point here? God made a promise in Genesis 3:15: [Slide 15]

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

Another *Man* would come. A *second* Adam. And while his heel would be bruised, in that same act he would crush the head of the serpent and thus re-establish His headship over all things. That is what Paul is alluding to in Ephesians 1:21-22. But notice *for whose benefit* that authority is being displayed in verse 22. "**For the** (benefit of the) **church.**" He goes on to describe the church in verse 23, "which is his body, the *fullness* of him who *fills* everything in every way. "

Are you getting googled by this verse? Do you hear what Paul is saying? Jesus did what Adam did not do and what we *cannot* do. We can populate the earth. But *we* cannot fill it

with His glorious, sovereign rule. That is why Jesus came. He was the epitome of what it means to be truly human. And when He came, he demonstrated His power not just by His miracles—but by submitting to His heavenly Father and perfectly reflecting His image to a watching world. Then He died and rose again to destroy the sin that had so terribly *dehumanized* man and *defaced* God’s image in man.

Paul says that Jesus fills *everything in every way*. What does that mean? Obviously this filling is not in a physical or spatial sense. It is in the sense of permeating the Universe with His Sovereign rule. It is another way of saying that He is in control. But nowhere is this more evident than in His fullness of or His *filling* of the church. The One who perfectly imaged God during His thirty three years on earth has ascended and is *now* imaging God as He fills and empowers His people to live out His rule in their lives!

This is *heavy* stuff. But the sense I get from it is that Jesus has undone the effect of sin and thus has restored His people, the church (you and me) to again **fill the earth** with a foretaste of His glorious rule. But while there is a sense in which this is already happening, it is by no means a done deal.

Listen to another prayer of Paul in for the church in Ephesians 3:16-19:

*¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may **be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

What is Paul praying for? That God will transform us from the inside out—that He will so overwhelm us with the knowledge of Christ’s love that we ourselves will be filled to the measure of **all the fullness of God**. Because we are united with Christ, He **already** has filled us. Yet in terms of our daily experience, we are not yet filled with His fullness. We are not all that God wants us to be. But that is what God is up to. Filling us with more and more of Himself. until one day we will be holy as He is holy. And then **we** will carry out the Creation mandate that Adam could not do. We will fill the *new heaven and new earth* with His glory. In the meantime, He is at work on us.

Bob has been talking about spiritual gifts in I Corinthians. Did you know that spiritual gifts are directly related to this objective? Just listen to Paul in Ephesians 4:7-10:

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” ⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, **in order to fill the whole universe.**) Verses 11-16 go on to talk about spiritual gifts.

The one who crushed the head of his foe has taken the spoils of battle and distributed them from heaven by His Spirit to the church (c.f. Cain's descendents in Gen. 4: 2-22; 11:4). Instead of using our God-given abilities for *self-serving* ends, we have been freed by the ascended Christ to *serve each other* for the glory of God as we live before a watching world!

And what is the ultimate outcome of this mutual ministry? Look at Ephesians 4:13:

*...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the **fullness** of Christ.*

But practically speaking how does this come about? How is it that the body of Christ at Cornerstone becomes increasingly filled with Christ? And what does this actually look like during the week? How do we recognize it when it is happening? Let's look at one more passage, Ephesians 5:18:

*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, **be filled with (by) the Spirit.***

I have already pointed out earlier that the Spirit is not the content of the filling. He is the One doing the filling. He is the filler! So what is the content? The content is Christ! We are to be filled with the One who alone reflects the true image of God and can do so in us. All that Paul is saying here is that we must *be aware of it and we must be actively cooperating with His Spirit.*

That brings us to two final questions:

1. *What does this filling look like? Ephesians 5:19-6:9*

Briefly give the overview of the text (Submitting/leading). The point here is that you must never separate your role from God's bigger plan in Christ. You cannot look at these passages in a strictly performance-based way. ("If I do my part and everyone else does their part, we'll all live happy, contented lives"). That is forgetting what Paul says in Ephesians 2 about the devastating effects of sin. Even as a redeemed child of God, you can't do your part in your own strength. Why? Your desires are constantly trying to blind you and rule you—and that leads to all kinds of conflict. And the people you have to relate to, your spouse, your family, your co-workers, other believers—they have the same problem! But if you look at and ponder how Christ treated you when you sinned against Him—how He was kind to you when you were anything but kind to Him. How He was compassionate (lit. hurt) with those who caused *His* suffering. How He forgave you when He had every right to damn you! (Eph. 4:32). When you gaze at Him and meditate on what He has done—and you are drawn to Him by His beauty and you long to become like the One who gave Himself for you—you become more and more full of Him. And it begins to show up in your relationships with others.

Transition: Which brings us to the second question....

2. *How do you cooperate with His filling of your life?*

Look at Ephesians 6:10-17 where Paul talks about armor of God. The One who has put all His enemies under His feet as given you what you need to be filled with His love and His power. When you study the various pieces of armor here, you will soon recognize that Paul is describing the outworking of the Gospel in everyday life. In essence He is saying: “Be *saturated* with the implications of the Gospel.”

That is how you can cooperate with the Spirit in becoming *filled with the fullness of Christ*. When you are tempted, it is not a matter of simply exercising willpower and determination to obey God. It is by recounting all the promises of God that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ to you. Promises that Jesus Himself used when He faced the Tempter in the wilderness of Judea. Promises that we can’t just hear once a week at church, but that we need to be immersed in and reminded of by our brothers and sister in Small Groups and close Christian friendships.

Brothers and sisters. Can I get personal for a moment? I don’t think I have ever needed this truth more in my life than I need it now. I am old enough and have lived long enough to get used to life and if I am not careful to slip into complacency. I love comfort. I love predictability. I love control so that my world feels safe. And so God has given me two teenagers to help me avoid that.

But there are times that my desire for a problem-free life can make me miss what God is doing in my life through the challenges of two teenagers. But when I google Ephesians, I am reminded that God’s agenda is so much bigger than my comfort. He wants to take this broken image of Himself—and work on it and change it so I will more and more reflect Him to my kids and to the world around me.

And that is a good place for us to start next week as we look at God’s plan for parenting in Ephesians 6:1-3. So don’t come looking for a silver bullet or a magic wand to make your parenting easier. Start googling Ephesians so you can get excited about what God is doing to make you a more accurate reflection of Jesus to others.