

**“STRENGTH” –
BEING FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD!**

Robert A. Bickert

Introduction

Why am I a Christian today and not an unbeliever?

Reason: The means of my salvation is my great great grandfather, Henry Wiegman.

Why? My grandfather Wesley enjoyed telling me stories about his growing up years on the farm. One story he liked to tell was about his grandfather Henry who lived with Wesley’s parents during his senior years. Henry had served as a Methodist lay preacher and evangelist. He had planted the Methodist Church in the German community where Wesley lived. My grandfather talked about his grandfather’s habit of prayer praying out in the barn where they stabled their horses. Grandpa said, “I could hear my grandfather praying out there. I would go to the barn door and open it a crack and look in. I could see my grandfather on his knees with his arms raised up to heaven and his face looking up as he prayed, ‘Lord save little Wesley and make him a blessing in life. Bless my children and my grandchildren and may they live to bless the world for Jesus.’”

Grandpa told me, “I am a minister of the gospel today because of my grandfather’s prayers.”

Yes, why am I a believer? Because of my great grandfather’s prayers for his family in the horse barn.

Why? What is the principle involved in prayer?

Dennis Kinlaw, founder of the Francis Asbury Society and past president of Asbury University, explains this principle in his message,

“Prayer, are you Pregnant?” at the Cove in N.C. in 2006.¹ This is Kinlaw’s insight,

That something can happen in my heart that can make a difference in someone else’s circumstances and possibilities, in another persons’ privileges and changes. At the heart of intercession is the person who interposes himself [stands between God and another person, an intercessor]. That person who interposes himself [who stands between God and another person] makes the saving power of God a possible opportunity for somebody, [the person interceded or prayed for]. That means that the key to every person’s well being and salvation rest outside of him/herself in someone else.

What does this mean? It means that because my great, great grandfather, Henry Wiegman, interceded for his family, I came to faith in Christ.

Why did Paul pray for the believers in the City of Ephesus, as we read from Ephesians 3:14-21? Remember what we learned about the living conditions in Ephesus in our DVD tour Tuesday. We heard that the believers faced daily conflict; they lived under daily persecution, even the threat of death or death itself.

Paul wanted these believers to be strong in faith. Paul wanted these believers to overcome their persecution and stand faithful for Jesus, their Lord. Paul wanted them to be victorious in the face of death.

Paul wanted their life to reflect the character of their God. Paul knew they could be strong if they understood their God’s character. In fact, Paul wanted them to imitate their God’s character, to be like God—“Be imitators of God as little Children and walk in love” (Eph. 5:1-2).

The reason why Paul wrote a letter to these Ephesian believers was to explain the character of their God and to tell them how they were to imitate God’s character.

How did Paul begin to explain God’s character?

¹Dennis Kinlaw, *Prayer, Are You Pregnant*, DVD/CD (Wilmore, KY: www.FrancisAsburySociety.com).

Paul began by telling the Ephesians what God had done for them, what he gave them.

An outline of Ephesians 1 looks like this: 1:1-14; First Prayer 1:15-23; 3:14-21 Second Prayer; 4:1 Commands.

Paul called what God had done for them, *Blessings!* Paul lists seven blessings:

1. Chosen to be holy and without blame before him in love—God's major goal
2. Predestined to be adopted as God's sons
3. Redeemed
4. Forgiven
5. Revealed God's mysterious plan
6. Inherited into God's family
7. Sealed with the Holy Spirit.

What was so shocking, so radically different about their God's actions, about God's blessings in contrast to their common cultural beliefs?

Paul pointed out that their God initiated giving. God gave to them first without them asking, without them begging, without them giving a sacrifice.

What was the custom or rule for how the Ephesians were to approach their God?

They must bring a sacrifice. The Igorot people of the Central Cordillera know that they must bring a sacrifice in order to approach their creator god Kabunon.

When we were in Cambodia, I watched our neighbor every morning bring a sacrifice to their spirit worship house, their *Neakta*, in the corner of their yard. Inside this little temple was a Buddha. The homeowner brought a gift of sacrifice such as tea in a cup, some type of food or fruit, and lit incense sticks to satisfy these spirits so that they would protect and bless the family. Every home and business had a *Neakta* in front of it. Everyone wants to be protected and blessed.

Paul called God's initiative *grace*—God reaching out to them out of his love, God putting his arms around them.

Did you notice how Paul addressed God? What term does Paul use in Ephesians 1:2-3? "Grace to you and peace from God our Father."

Father!

How many fathers do you have?

How many gods and goddesses did the Ephesian's worship annually?

They had built at least 20 temples to house and worship their gods.

Remember, every god must receive a suitable sacrifice so that they will bless the city. Every member of the city must participate so as not to anger the gods who can withhold blessings as well as bring a curse.

The term, "Father" implies how many? One!

The term "Father" also implies something else, what? The term implies the source of our blessings, our provisions, our food, our protection, our security.

Father also implies something even more significant—a relationship; a loving relationship between a father and his children.

I read the story of a lady from Pakistan whose husband was a high official in the Pakistani government. A friend gave her a copy of the New Testament. As she began to read, she felt it was impossible for her to believe that people could begin a prayer with "Our Father." One thing she knew about Allah was that he was not like humans. He was greater than humans and infinitely different and that he could never be described in human terms, and certainly never as directly as father. However, when she came to faith in Jesus Christ, her first response was to lift her heart and say, "Father," and the moment she uttered the word, she fell to the floor in absolute terror of being killed for her impertinence. But instead, the heavenly father came to her in all his love and compassion and she heard one word: "Daughter." She recalled, "I

wept uncontrollably at the reality that God in his sovereignty and greatness could belong to me in that kind of a relationship.”²

Paul continues his greeting, “Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus who has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blame before him in love.” God’s purpose for us, chosen to “be holy and without blame,” comprises Paul’s theme for writing.

God used a common relational term used among the people of the Ancient Near East to explain his relational nature, his character; the word “*holy*.”

It is important to understand that all the gods and goddesses in the ancient world were called holy. Also, things or persons that belonged to these gods were also called holy such as the temple. People who served the gods were holy; temple prostitutes were considered holy; temple priests were called holy.

Why? Because of *their relational connection* with their god or goddesses.

God used another commonly used practice in the Ancient Near East in the time of Abraham and Moses, the term “*covenant*” to teach Israel about his relational character.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties or people like a marriage contract.

The term “holy” can only be understood in the context of the covenant relationship.

What binds a husband and wife together is a relationship between the two, an affinity, like a magnet, to the likes and dislikes of the other person.

What unites a husband and wife is their ability to communicate, to share one’s heart with the other, the ability to give oneself completely to the other. This is what unites a couple as one flesh.

² Dennis Kinlaw, *This Day with the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), Feb. 8.

My wife and I had been married four years. We believed we had a good marriage. We were in ministry together. But one day in the fall of 1966 after the birth of our second son, my wife told me that she felt like committing suicide. This shocked me. What was wrong? Kay had often told me that we could not communicate. Oh yes, we talked about our food, about taking care of the children, about our schedule and work, but not things from the heart. Something was blocking true heart-to-heart communication. Kay felt that I was holding something from her and her imagination kept building whatever it was into a huge mountain. Within a couple of weeks of our marriage, Kay shared her heart, her deepest secrets with me. She was expecting me to do the same. Instead, I became silent and closed the conversation. My failure to become transparent blocked true communication and prevented us from becoming one. While in my third year in seminary, one of my classmates gave a message in senior preaching class in the spring of 1967 that spoke to my heart. It was like a light turning on in my thinking. “I see now the problem between Kay and myself. We cannot communicate.” When Kay returned home from teaching school, I quickly greeted her with, “Honey, I know the problem between us—we cannot communicate!”

Her response, “Yes, I have been telling you that for years!” That evening, after putting our two boys to bed, I took Kay by the hand and said, “I want to share my hidden self with you.”

That night we truly became one flesh, nothing hidden between us. What a wonderful feeling.

Paul reflects back to what God told the children of Israel after he had delivered them out of 400 years of slavery in Egypt. God wanted them to understand his character as a loving father to his children.

Let’s read Exodus 19:3-6. Notice the relational terms used, “holy,” “covenant” in v. 3.

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a

special treasure to Me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

“These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Notice the condition for a relationship with Israel’s God who had delivered them from slavery: “if . . . then.”

God acted first. He reached out to the two million children of Israel.

God extended Grace: “I brought you to My self,” like an eagle swooping down and picking them up.

“Now because of what I have done, because I loved you, I brought you to Myself like a husband bringing his bride.”

Therefore, God asked them to do certain things so they could have a relationship with God, like a husband and a wife. Therefore, “*If you obey my voice—Listen, hear, if you keep my covenant—the ten words or commandments.*”

These 10 Commandments explained what God liked and what God did not like. God was saying, “If we are going to live together in a relationship, you must obey me, you must please me, hate what I hate, love what I love. *Then you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In other words, you will be in a right relationship with me.*”

God said, “You must be holy because I am holy. You must have my character, you must imitate me, so we can freely communicate with one another.”

Did the Ephesians understand this relational character of their God?

What was Paul’s means to help them understand?

Paul prayed.

Keep in mind what Kinlaw explained about prayer: *The key to every one’s well being rests outside of him/ herself in someone else.*

Lets look at Eph. 1:15: “For this reason.” This refers back to what God did for them cited in verses 1:4-14, just like God’s deliverance

of Israel out of Egyptian slavery—“chosen to be holy and without blame.”

Prayer: *“Oh Father, please give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus, open their spiritual eyes, the eyes of their heart, their mind, so that they will really be enlightened.”*

Notice verse 18, the purpose of Paul’s prayer, “in order that.” This is what Paul really wanted them to know, to understand.

1. **Know** the hope of God’s calling—to be holy and blameless, that is, know how to relate to their Father, know how to relate to God’s children, be blameless. Live together in right relationships; act toward one another with pure motives. Do not take advantage, do not steal, do not lie, do not covet (the 10 Commandments).

God created us so we can be God’s conversational partners. Live in a right relationship to God and to others.

2. **Know** that we are God’s inheritance; we are his wealth, his jewels.

3. **Know**, understand the power God has given to his children—the exceeding greatness of his mighty power. What is this power? The Greek root is *dunamis* from which we get the word dynamite.

How did God illustrate his mighty power given to believers?

- (1) He raised Christ from the dead (v. 20).
- (2) He seated Christ at His right hand (v. 20).
- (3) He put all things under His feet (v. 22).
- (4) He made Him head over the Church, His body (v. 22).
- (5) He made us alive who were dead (2:1-7).
- (6) He united Gentiles and Jews in one body (2:11-22).

Paul continues his prayer in Chapter 3:14 ff.: “for this reason.”

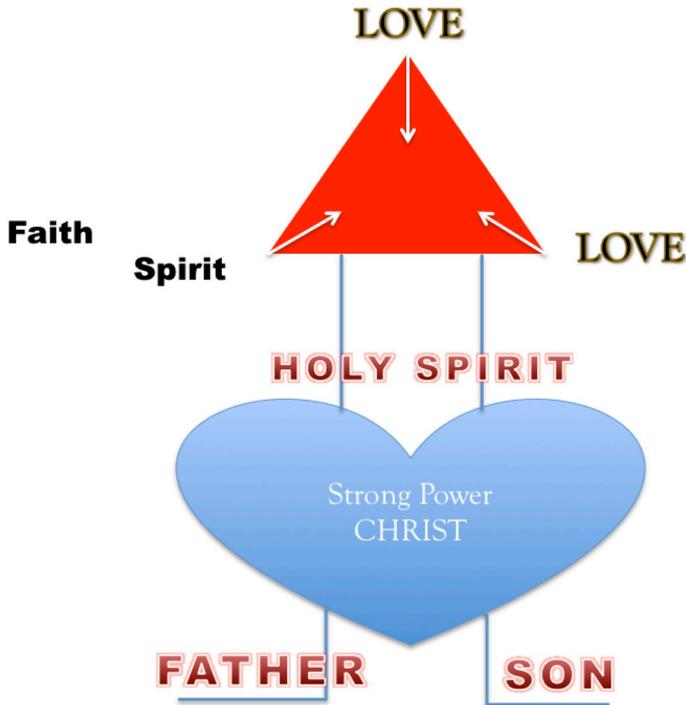
Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would be strong (3:16).

Did the Ephesians need to be strong in order to withstand their pagan culture?

Did they need to be strong to withstand the pagan practices such as the sexual worship of Artemis, their patron goddess of fertility?

Did they need to be strong to be true to their Lord, Jesus Christ in the face of death?

Means of Strength: “with Power”



How could they be strong? What means did Paul give?

Notice the Trinitarian structure in this diagram of the triangle: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Notice the arrows moving to the center from each member of the Trinity.

Each member focuses on the other, lifts up the other. Jesus used the word, “glorify” or “glorified” five times in his prayer in John 17:1-5. “Father, glorify me as I have glorified you on earth.” Jesus lifted up the

Father, and the Father is now lifting up Jesus. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit, when he is come, will “glorify” or lift him up (John 16:14). Each member of the Trinity is glorifying or lifting up the other. They are other oriented or other focused. This is the character of *agape* love, “other oriented”, or “other focused.” The central characteristic of the Trinity is love. ***God is love.***

The Trinity is the source of our strength—power, the capacity to love others more than ones’ self.

Let’s look at the four purposes Paul prayed for:

1. **That** he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man,

2. **That** Christ may dwell in your body through faith,

3. **That** you, having been rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the width and length and what is the depth and height—to know the love of God which passes knowledge,

4. **That** you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Let’s explain each part.

What is the *objective* of Paul’s prayer? That you be STRENGTHENED with might — **power** *dunamis*.

What is the *source* of power *dunami* : Through *His SPIRIT* – the means.

What is the *home* of **power** — in the *INNER MAN*.

What are the *purposes* of **power**: *that Christ may DWELL in your heart*, the inner man in an abiding living relationship.

(1) What is the *means* of dwelling: *Through faith*.

(2) What are the *purposes* vs. 17-19 — “in order that.”

a. Having been *rooted* — (the result of being rooted) *in love*.

b. Having been *grounded in love*.

c. You might have *full strength*.

1. *To comprehend the love of Christ*

(a cube—width, length, depth, height of God’s love)

2. To *know the love of Christ* which surpasses knowledge!

What is Paul's *final purpose* — “in order that”: **“You BE FILLED with all the fullness of God.”**

Notice that “be filled” is in the aorist tense—a one-time act. Being filled is the means of strength, being strong, being able to love others more than yourself, to love those who persecute you, to love as God loves because God, who is love, is completely filling your inner being. Being completely filled with God allows us to live in an intimate relationship with our Father, to have a—face-to-face—eye-to-eye, be God’s conversational partner, walking in a “hand-in-hand” relationship.

Dennis Kinlaw wrote in *This Day with the Master*, “When God puts his holiness into a human heart, it does not become a human possession. Rather, when the presence of God himself comes in and fills a person’s heart, it enables that person to share in God’s holy character. It is possible for this Holy One to come and dwell in us so we begin to look like Him.”³

Is God able to completely fill us with Himself? Is the Holy Spirit able to complete us, purify us so that we can live in a loving relationship with our Father?

Paul concludes his prayer in this confidence, v. 20:

“Now until Him who is able to do exceedingly more than we can ask or think.”

Notice that “is able” is the present participle of *dunami*—power. God always has power available. God is not limited; he is always able to meet our need.

Here is the key to God’s ability to help us: “According to the power that is at work in us.” This power, *dunami* is the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Yes, God is able to fill us with himself IF we let him do so.

Chapters 4-6 covers action we must take in response to what God has done for us. Paul wrote these chapters in the imperative voice (in Greek grammar), as commands to obey. Paul begins chapter four

³ Kinlaw, *This Day with the Master*, Feb. 13.

with, “Therefore” meaning, “because of all that God has done for you” covered in chapters 1-3, now live like this—“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (4:1 NIV).

Remember, in 1:4, Paul points out that God has chosen us to live holy and blameless. Paul now continues in the next three chapters 4-6 to explain what “holy” and “blameless living” looks like. He explains how to live daily in a holy or right relationship with God and how to live in a right relationship with others with right actions and pure motives.

In 4:22, Paul commands, “Put off the old man!” This is the self-centered nature we are born with, the “I will do what I want to do attitude.” Paul refers to this nature in Romans 2:8: “But for those who are *self-seeking* and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Paul commanded, “Put on the new man which after God is created in true righteousness and holiness.”

I remember the Wednesday night in March 1955, I knelt at the altar and put off my old man, when I died to my spiritual pride. I had been seeking for a pure, clean heart for over a year. I claimed Jesus’ promise in Matt. 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.” As I continued to walk in the light and continued to obey the Holy Spirit’s voice to make restitution and ask forgiveness from people I had hurt with my critical words, God was breaking down my will and pride. When I made my last known restitution to ask forgiveness from the members of the Baptist Church I had attended my first year of high school during their spring revival, I was now able to believe God could clean me and fill me with His Holy Spirit. That Wednesday night prayer meeting in the Nazarene Church, when I stood up to share my joy in having made my last restitution, the Holy Spirit said, “Tonight I will cleanse and fill you if come and pray.” I asked the people to come and pray with me as I went forward and knelt at the altar. There I confessed things hidden in my inner being, which seemed to put a knife in my spiritual pride. I died to myself. I surrendered myself. I knew of nothing left between me and God. I felt free, clean, pure. I then looked up and said, “Father, please fill me now. I believe you to do so.” I felt so peaceful. I felt a wonderful sense of love filling my being. I felt as if I could put my arms around everyone

present. I knew I had put on “the new man.” I knew God had filled me with Himself. I experienced an overflowing sense of love that far exceeded the love I had experienced when I first invited Christ to come into my heart.

Frank Laubach, the World’s Apostle to the Illiterates, tells his story of death to his “Old Man” and “Putting on the New Man” filled with God’s love.

Dr. Laubach came to Asbury Seminary in 1968 to teach his course on literacy during my senior year. Kay and I took his course and learned his story.

Frank and his wife Effa went as missionaries to the Philippines in 1915 with the Congregational Church. He taught in Union Seminary in Manila and was almost elected president. He began an experiment with God trying to give 15 minutes out of an hour to focus on God. Later, they went to the Island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines. Frank ministered to the Moros (Muslims) living around Lake Lanao. By the early 1930’s Frank was becoming discouraged. He had little success. He became very discouraged with his own ministry among the Moros, very discouraged with himself. In the evenings he would climb up Signal Hill behind their home to a spot where he could overlook the city, meditate and pray. This time led him into a deeper experience with God he called “Minutes with God.” Frank now sought to give one second out of every minute during his waking day to God. He would focus on a thought of praise, send an SOS request, or think of God’s glory. Frank felt he was making progress, the more he prayed, the more he successes. Frank wrote to his father and shared his experiment and asked him to pray for him. He wanted to please God.

One evening in prayer on Signal Hill, Laubach began to reflect on his life. He saw his pride, he was proud of his educational achievements. He had a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University. He had also studied theology at Union Theological Seminary. He was proud of his family heritage, his father was a dentist, his mother a teacher. He was proud of his accomplishments. He had been a seminary professor; he had published a history of the Philippines (1925).

Laubach saw that his life was a complete failure over the past 20 years. Laubach analyzed how he looked at the Moros. He had disgust

for their religion, for their holy book, the Koran, for their betel nut chewing, for their unclean ways. Laubach confessed, “I do not like them.” God seemed to be speaking to him, “My child, you have failed because you do not really love these Moros. You feel superior to them because you are white. If you can forget you are an American and think only how I love them, they will respond.”

With these words, Laubach experienced what he considered a reconversion. In self pity he had been asking God, “What can I do for hateful people like these: murders, thieves, dirty, filthy, betel nut chewers –our enemies.” But at this moment of insight, he felt God stripping away his sense of superiority. “I am that way. I do feel better and superior, but I am miserable in my failure to live up to your expectations. I wish I were dead. I can not do anything with these people.” He waited for a moment, but God did nothing about his desire to be dead. He was still alive! So Laubach prayed, “Come and change me then. Make me over.” And it happened.

Laubach explained. “I felt a sense of forgiveness, a sense of peace. In that moment I became “color-blind.” Something seemed to snap inside me and I fell in love with the Moros.⁴

As I walked down the mountain, “I felt I could put my arms around the first betel nut chewing, filthy old murderer who came along.”⁵

Then the Holy Spirit whispered,

“If you want the Moros to be fair with your religion, be fair with theirs. Study their Koran with them.” God’s voice seemed to speak. “My child,” it said, “you have struck your pace. Here in Lanao you will accomplish something with me for the human race. You will broaden the circles of their minds which is good. You will help them to a new

⁴ Laubach read and studied the world’s great mystics. He saw that they have gone through two periods of anguish. He wrote in his spiritual diary as he read these works, “The first was when they broke with their sinful habits. This was called ‘Purgation.’ After this process was finished, there came a period of such deep joy that they supposed their troubles were over. But sooner or later came the second dark night of the soul, more terrible than the first when self must die” (David Mason, *Apostle to the Illiterates* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966], 37).

⁵ Mason, *Apostle to the Illiterates*, 33.

comradeship with me which is the most wonderful thing that can happen to any man. You must not fret because you have not done more in your past life. You need not worry about what you *do*, but only about what you *are*. And what you *are* depends upon whether you are holding on to *Me*.⁶

As Laubach walked down the hill, he saw a group of Datu's (Muslim priests) coming up. He could see hate and contempt in their eyes.

Just then, a thought flashed in his mind. "I called out after them—I want to study your Koran, will you teach me?"

At these words, their look of hate changed to amazement. One said, "I think he wants to become a Muslim."

Frank explains, "The next night, my sala [living room] was filled with Datu's with their Korans." He said, "God changed my attitude and my approach. I accepted them and they learned to accept me. I saw their need to read. God gave me a plan to teach them their language with pictures corresponding to the sound of their alphabet. Within days, I was teaching them to read with my picture chart. Their self-esteem went up. They loved me. One Datu ordered all who learned to read to teach someone else. This gave me the idea for our motto, "Each One Teach One."

This teaching process began a world wide literacy ministry, Laubach Literacy Fund.

By the age of 84, Laubach had taught more people to read than any other human being. *Time Magazine* referred to him as the founder of a world wide literacy drive. Frank taught people to read in over 300 languages in 100 countries. Lowell Thomas, [national radio commentator] called Frank, "The foremost teacher of our times." Frank held one earned Ph.D. and four honorary doctor's degrees.⁷ Norman

⁶ Mason, *Apostle to the Illiterates*, 34.

⁷ Frank had earned a Bachelor of Arts, a Bachelor of Education, a Bachelor of Divinity, a Master of Arts and a Master of Education; a Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology, a Doctor of Divinity, a Doctor of Letters, a Doctor of Humane Letters and a Doctor of Philanthropy (Mason, *Apostle to the Illiterates*, 17-18).

Vincent Peale in a *Look Magazine* article called Laubach, “one of the five greatest men in the world.”

Laubach reflecting on his life’s accomplishments, “It all began on Signal Hill when I died to myself and gave God time in prayer. The more I prayed, the more I accomplished.”

Conclusion

Have you died to yourself, to the old man’s self-centered nature? Are you struggling with defeat, being up and down in your spiritual life?

Are you living in an intimate, eye-to-eye relationship with your heavenly Father?

Are you strong, overcoming temptations, living with pure motives?

Would you like to put on the new man? Would you like God to fill you with all of Himself so you can love others as God loves?

As we stand and sing, “I surrender all,” this altar is open for you to come and surrender all. God is here to meet your need. Come and die. Come and let God fill you with Himself.