

Series: Unsearchable Riches in Christ (Ephesians)

Text: Ephesians 3:20-21

Message #15 (November 26, 2006)

THE ABLENESS OF GOD

Introduction

1. This is a grand doxology. What a way to end a prayer! It is almost as if Paul prays and then stops and asks himself, “What is it that makes all of this possible (the work of God in us resulting in Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, our comprehension of the love of God in our lives and experiencing the fullness of God). The one thing that makes all of this possible is God’s grace! These are staggering petitions that are possible only through God by His grace!
2. I agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who said, “The Apostle ended with a doxology because he could do nothing else. What he was praying was such a glorious possibility that he involuntarily bursts forth into this great hymn of praise, worship and adoration.”
3. Perhaps a good way to check our level of spiritual maturity and our level of appropriate gratefulness to God is to observe our response after we have prayed. For Paul, it was sort of an afterglow of true worship. Unfortunately we are more often like the ancient Israelites as recorded in Psalm 81:8, 10 –13. Instead of worship, there is disobedience and indifference.

8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you! O Israel, if you would but listen to me! 10 I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. 11 "But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. 12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. 13 Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!

4. Through Paul, God has admonished us. He has called us to strengthen the inner man. We are to feed and exercise the inner man so that a whole series of results occur. When we strengthen the inner man with God’s power (by feeding and exercising it), Christ, who indwells us, settles in and is at home in our hearts. With Him at home in our hearts, we begin to comprehend the incomprehensible, in that we come to know the dimensions, the extremities of God’s love, which result in us experiencing the fullness of God! God does all of this by His grace! (Remember how Paul extolled the grace of God in chapter 1?)

5. Understanding these things, caused Paul to break out in a grand doxology. James Boice reminds us, “At times the Bible humbles us, making us conscious of our sin. At other times, it thrills us as we think of all God has done in Christ for our salvation. Some Bible passages instruct us. Some rebuke us. Some stir us up to great action. In some passages we seem to gain a glimpse into hell. In others, a door is opened into heaven.” That is where we are today! Let’s unpack this grand doxological benediction.

I. PAUL GLORIFIES GOD FOR WHAT HE IS ABLE TO DO

A. What God is able to do – the pyramid of power (Ruth Paxson has taken the KJV and arranged it into a pyramid as follows:

Unto Him

That is able to do

All that we ask or think

Above all that we ask or think

Abundantly above all that we ask or think

Exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think

According to the power that works in us

1. God is able to do all that we could ever ask of think – I believe we would acknowledge that God is able to do anything, but this suggests that God’s ability to work is not just related His own concerns and interests, but extends to the concerns and interests of His people! We tend to be pretty conservative in our praying, perhaps afraid of embarrassing ourselves before a great and holy God. While it is true that we can pray wrongly, I offer this for your consideration from 1 John 3:21-22. *Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.* God cannot only do what I ask, but He is able to do those things that I may think about but am afraid or too embarrassed to ask! But that is not all!
2. God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we could ask or think – Is this not just like God. Often we will ask and when He is done answering, it turns out to be far greater and better and more amazing than we ever thought possible? Abraham was probably expecting God to create from him a large family. His prayers

were often directed to God just wanting one son and troubled that it was so long in happening. Instead ultimately through Abraham comes the Messiah who has purchased for Himself a people from every tribe and tongue and nation! How is that for abundantly beyond all that we ask or think! What about Moses? He was called by God to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt. He led them out and he was the one to present to them God's law and he led them to the threshold of rest into a new land. His story would be used in the OT and the NT as an illustration of God's deliverance from sin into the rest of eternal life! That's abundantly beyond what we could ask or think! How about David? Who would have guessed that this young shepherd boy would be the same who would be called upon to lead the nation – whose reign was a type of Christ's future reign? That's abundantly beyond what we could ask or think! The word translated “immeasurably” (NIV), and “exceedingly abundantly” (KJV) and “far more abundantly (ESV), and my favorite translation of this word “exceedingly abundantly beyond” (NAS), all comes from something Paul made up (abundant + out of + over and beyond = “the out of, over and beyond, abundance of the ableness of God”)! It is found only here and in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 – describing the fervency of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians! I am not saying that God cannot do these things for us in terms of blessings right now, but I rather suspect that the “exceedingly abundantly beyond” will be finally realized in His presence. The idea is quite similar to what he says to the Ephesians in 2:6-7! (**W.A. Criswell, *Ephesians*, p. 141**).

B. How God is able to do this

1. Because of His power available to me now – We might be inclined to assume that such working of God's power may be for Abraham or Moses or David, but surely not for me! Yet Paul says that this power is at work in us. Much like Philippians 2:13, “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”
2. Because of what God has already done in me – When God by His Spirit has empowered us and Christ settles down and becomes at home in us, and God's love has mastered us and He has filled us with His fullness, He then is ready and able to do all of this that Paul expresses. As strange as it seems, though the power is available, He does not release it until we are ready to receive it. But when we are ready, look out!

That was what Jesus was talking about in John 14:12-14. *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.* God is ready to release the power if we are ready to receive it!

3. In the words of a hymn written by John Newton, “Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring; For His grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much.” Lloyd-Jones said, “Bring your most daring petitions, bring your most impossible requests, add others to them; let the whole Church join together in their wildest desires and demands! There is no danger of exceeding the limit – ‘For his grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much.’” We are too much like Sarah who laughed in unbelief at the promise of God. We are too much like Mary who staggered in unbelief, “How can these things be?” She was mildly rebuked by the angel who said, “With God nothing is impossible.”

II. PAUL GLORIFIES GOD FOR WHAT HE DESIRES TO DO

A. He desires to release His power in us now

1. The word “now” in verse 20 probably could mean now, as in time, but more likely here means, “now” in terms of the sequence of things that are at work in me in verses 16-19. Since those things are happening, now He will do exceedingly, abundantly beyond!
2. When God is the one through whom the power comes and by whom the power is released, He is the one who receives the glory. Paul reminded the Corinthians, “we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” William Hendriksen wrote, “The omnipotence which God reveals in answering prayer is not a figment of the imagination but is in line with that mighty operation of his power that is already at work ‘within us’. It called us out of darkness and brought us into the light, changed children of wrath into dearly beloved sons and daughters, brought about reconciliation between God and man, and between Jew and Gentile. It is God’s infinite might which he exerted when he raised Christ from the

dead, and which is now operative in our own, parallel, spiritual resurrection. Therefore to the One who does not need to over-exert himself in order to fulfill our desires, but can do it with ease, ‘be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.’”

B. He desires to demonstrate His power in the church because of Christ

1. God is glorified through what He does in believers. He desires to be glorified in the church. Perhaps nothing can show the power and glory of God like the redeemed who are living as Paul prayed here. We show the manifold wisdom of God! We are the living advertisement for God. When the church is functioning as God designed, He gets the glory.
2. God demonstrates His glory through the church – When the church is sputtering, that’s a problem. When we go along doing our little deal, the world assumes that God is going along doing His little deal! But when the church is functioning as God has designed, the world cannot help but take notice! (Have you ever thought about what God can do? He is able to forgive and redeem. He can comfort and counsel. He is able to provide and protect. He can restore and even resurrect the dead! That same God is at work in you! As He works in the church, the world must take notice!

C. He desires to display His power for all eternity

1. What we do in His power today will glorify Christ throughout all the ages. All that we are now and all that we will be for eternity is found in Christ. The glory that may be seen in the church is the reflected glory of her Savior. “All I am and all I hope to be, I owe it all to thee!” As we praise Him now, that praise will echo throughout the ages declaring Him to be a wonderful, glorious Savior.
2. What we do now brings glory to God to all the generations of the ages of the ages. In effect we could say that the greatest ministry of the church is yet to come. As the song writer so correctly penned, “When we’ve been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.”

Conclusion

1. Paul concludes his prayer with, “Amen.” What else could be said? “Amen” means “let it be so.” Is this really the honest prayer of our hearts? Can we say amen to what Paul has prayed here? Are we ready to enter into this doxology? Could we sing with Samuel

Davies, Great God of wonders, all Thy ways are matchless, godlike and divine; But the fair glories of Thy grace more godlike and unrivaled shine. O may this strange, this matchless grace, this godlike miracle of love, fill the wide earth with grateful praise, and all the angelic hosts above: Who is a pardoning God like Thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?

2. I want so much to see this local church filled with all the fullness of God – comprehending the love of Christ – making certain that Christ is at home in our hearts – because we are strengthened and continue to be strengthened in the inner man with the power He has supplied for that very purpose through His Holy Spirit. Do we want that? Do we really?
3. Would you make this the prayer of your heart for this coming year for yourself and for this congregation? I must believe that if we were so focused, that God would hear and He would do what He says He can do and desires to do! May it be so!