

# Ephesians 3:20-21 Commentary

PREVIOUS

EPHESIANS - CHRIST AND THE CHURCH  
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NEXT

Ephesians 3:20 **Now** to Him who is **able** to **do** far more abundantly **beyond all** that we **ask or think**, **according** to the **power** that **works within** us, ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [To de dunameno](#) (PPMSD) [huper panta poiesai](#) (AAN) [huperekperissou on aitoumetha](#) (1PPMI) [e nooumen](#) (1PPAI) [kata ten dunamin ten energoumenen](#) (PMPFSA) [en hemin](#).

**BGT** Τ ὁ δυναμι ν π ρ π ντα ποι σαι περεκπερισσο ν α το μεθα νοο μεν κατ τ ν ὁ ναμιν τ ν νεργουι νην ν μ ν,

**Amplified:** Now to Him Who, by (in consequence of) the [action of His] power that is at work within us, is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly, far over and above all that we [dare] ask or think [infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes, or dreams]— ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** To him that is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power which works in us,. ([Westminster Press](#))

**ESV** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,

**KJV:** Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

**NET:** Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do far beyond all that we ask or think, ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV** Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

**NLT:** Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.(NLT - Tyndale House)

**NLT (revised)** Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

**Phillips:** Now to him who by his power within us is able to do far more than we ever dare to ask or imagine - (Phillips: Touchstone)

**Wuest:** Now to the One who is able to do beyond all things, superabundantly beyond and over and above those things that we are asking for ourselves and considering, in the measure of the power which is operative in us ([Eerdmans Publishing](#))

**Young's Literal:** and to Him who is able above all things to do exceeding abundantly what we ask or think, according to the power that is working in us,

**NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO DO FAR MORE ABUNDANTLY BEYOND ALL THAT WE ASK OR THINK: To de dunameno (PPMSD) huper panta poiesai (AAN) huperekperissou on aitoumetha (1PPMI) e nooumen (1PPAI):**

- **Now to Him Who is able** Ge 17:1; 18:4; 2Chr 25:9; Jer 32:17,27; Daniel 3:17; 6:20; Matthew 3:9; John 10:29,30; Ro 4:21; 16:25; Hebrews 7:25; 11:19; 13:20,21; Jas 4:12; Jude 1:24
- **far more abundantly beyond** Ex 34:6; 2Sa 7:19; 1Ki 3:13; Ps 36:8,9; Song 5:1; Isa 35:2; 55:7; Jn 10:10; 1Co 2:9; 1Ti 1:14; 2Pe 1:11
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:18-21 The Fullness of God, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 The Christian Turn-on](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 Experiencing the Power of Christ](#) - John MacArthur

- [Ephesians 3:20-21 God is Able!](#) - Steven Cole
- See article [GOD IS ABLE](#)

#### Related Passages:

Jeremiah 32:17; 'Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! **Nothing is too difficult for You,**

Jeremiah 32:27 "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; **is anything too difficult for Me?"**

1 Kings 3:13 **'I have also given you what you have not asked,** both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days.

Daniel 3:17; "If it be so, our God whom we serve is **able to deliver us** from the furnace of blazing fire; and **He will deliver us out of your hand,** O king.

Romans 4:21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, **He was able** also to perform.

1 Timothy 1:14 and the grace of our Lord was **more than abundant,** with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.

### GOD IS ABLE TO DO FAR MORE THAN WORDS CAN DESCRIBE!

**Now to Him Who is able** ([dunamai](#)) **to do** ([poieo](#)) **far more abundantly** ([Huperekperissou](#)) **beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us** -**Now** ([de](#)) is used here as a marker linking narrative segments. **Now to Him** marks another of Pauline doxology (a liturgical formula of praise to God) addressed to the Father to Whom the prayer was initially addressed (Eph 3:14). Able is in the **present tense** emphasizing that God is continually **able!** He is no part-time God, but is ever ready and able to come to our aid and our appeals (cf Heb 2:18). And so this doxology begins with an ascription of the omnipotent power to God. He is the all powerful One (Ro 16:25+; Jude 24, 25+), Who can accomplish surpassingly great deeds on behalf of His children. **Far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think** is the potential of God in every believer's life! The question is to you (I) really believe this is true? We should because Paul's ascription of praise to God's affirms His ability to answer our prayers. Why should we hesitate to offer our deepest petitions? We need to apply the words of **John Newton's** hymn [Come, My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare](#) and remember that...

Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much.

**John MacArthur** - When the Holy Spirit has empowered us, Christ has indwelt us, love has mastered us, and God has filled us with His own fullness, then He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Until those conditions are met, God's working in us is limited. When they are met, His working in us is unlimited. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14). (See [Ephesians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Wuest** adds that the compound word **far more abundantly** ([Huperekperissou](#)) "is a superlative of superlatives in force. It speaks of the ability of God to do something, that ability having more than enough potential power, this power exhaustless, and then some on top of that. Thus, Paul says that God is able to do super-abundantly above and beyond what we ask or think, and then some on top of that. ([Word Studies - Eerdman](#))

Our highest aspirations are not beyond God's power to grant.

**Jowett** Paul is saying goes something like this "What I have asked for is as nothing compared to the ability of my God to give. I've asked for a cupful, and the ocean remains. I've asked for a sunbeam, and the sun abides. My best asking falls immeasurably short of my Father's giving. It's beyond all that we can ask."

**Steven Cole** - Paul has just prayed that the Ephesians would be filled up to all the fullness of God. It's a prayer that they would come to total spiritual perfection! You can't go any higher than to be filled with all the fullness of God! Paul adds this doxology to say, "In case you think that it is too much to ask God to fill His saints to all of His fullness, remember that He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to His power and for His glory. God is not just able to do beyond what we ask,

but *abundantly* beyond. But that's not enough, He is able to do *far more* abundantly beyond what we ask. But, we still aren't to the limit: "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask *or think*, according to the power that works within us." Now, what is it that you need? I want to encourage you to pray in faith, asking God to do far beyond all that we can ask or think....Keep in mind that in the context, Paul's prayer for God to do abundantly beyond what we ask or think is not a prayer for physical miracles, but rather for Christ to dwell in the hearts of believers so that we may comprehend His great love for us, so that we will grow to complete spiritual maturity." ([God is Able!](#))

**Blaikie** - The study and exposition of the amazing riches of the grace of God gives birth to an outburst of praise toward the Divine Source of all this mercy, past, present, and to come ([Pulpit Commentary](#))

**John Eadie** - The apostle supposes his prayer to be answered, and all its requests conferred. The Divine Giver of such munificent donations is surely worthy of all homage, and especially worthy of all homage in the character of the answerer of prayer. By "**now**" he passes to a different subject—from recipients to the Giver. Praise succeeds prayer—the anthem is its fitting conclusion. ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

**Dunn** - We notice now that the apostle's four petitions are sandwiched between two references to God. In verses 14-16 He is the Father of the whole family and possesses infinite riches in glory; in verses 20 and 21 He is the one who works powerfully within us. Such a God can answer prayer. God's ability to answer prayer is forcefully stated by the apostle in a composite expression of seven stages. (1) He is able to do or to work, for He is neither idle, nor inactive, nor dead. (2) He is able to do what we ask, for He hears and answers prayer. (3) He is able to do what we ask or think, for He reads our thoughts, and sometimes we imagine things for which we dare not and therefore do not ask. (4) He is able to do all that we ask or think, for He knows it all and can perform it all. (5) He is able to do more than all that we ask or think, for His expectations are higher than ours. (6) He is able to do much more, or more abundantly, than all that we ask or think, for He does not give His grace by calculated measure. (7) He is able to do very much more, far more abundantly, than all that we ask or think, for He is a God of super-abundance. ([Source](#))

**Maclaren** - Though God can give us nothing more than it is, He can give us more than we think it to be, and more than we ask, when we ask this. Therefore the grand doxology of our text crowns and surpasses even this great prayer. The higher true prayer climbs, the wider is its view; and the wider is its view, the more conscious is it that the horizon of its vision is far within the borders of the goodly land. And as we gaze into what we can discern of the fulness of God, prayer will melt into thanksgiving and the doxology for the swift answer will follow close upon the last words of supplication. So is it here; so it may be always. The form of our text then marks the confidence of Paul's prayer. The exuberant fervour of his faith, as well as his natural impetuosity and ardour, comes out in the heaped-up words expressive of immensity and duration. He is like some archer watching, with parted lips, the flight of his arrow to the mark. He is gazing on God confident that he has not asked in vain.

**Blaikie** - In thinking of God it is as if we thought of space—however far our conceptions may travel, there is still infinity beyond. Paul had asked much in this prayer, and thoughts can always travel beyond words, yet the excess of God's power beyond both was infinite. This excess is denoted by a double term of abundance (ποῖησαι ὑπὲρ πάντα and ὑπερεκπερισσού), as if the apostle wished to fill our minds with the idea of absolute infinity of gracious power in God. ([Pulpit Commentary](#))

**Constable** - The basis for Paul's confidence that God is able to do far beyond what he had prayed for or could even imagine was God's bringing Jews and Gentiles together in one body. With God's provision of love, both groups could function harmoniously together in the church. Glory would come to God in the church for uniting these two previously irreconcilable groups and for enabling them to love and to work together as fellow members of the same body. This praise will continue forever. ([Expository Notes](#))

**Alexander Maclaren** - The Apostle in his fervid way strains language to express how far the possibility of the divine working extends. He is able, not only to do all things, but 'beyond all things'-a vehement way of putting the boundless reach of that gracious power. And what he means by this 'beyond all things' is more fully expressed in the next words, in which he labours by accumulating synonyms to convey his sense of the transcendent energy which waits to bless: 'exceeding abundantly above what we ask.' And as, alas! our desires are but shrunk and narrow beside our thoughts, he sweeps a wider orbit when he adds 'above what we think.' He has been asking wonderful things, and yet even his farthest-reaching petitions fall far on this side of the greatness of God's power. One might think that even it could go no further than filling us 'with all the fulness of God.' Nor can it; but it may far transcend our conceptions of what that is, and astonish us by its surpassing our thoughts, no less than it shames us by exceeding our prayers. ([Sermon](#))

David said "my cup overflows" (Ps 23:5)

Believers can say "He brought me to the banquet hall and His banner over me is love" (Song 2:4)

"Pray the largest prayers. You cannot think a prayer so large that God, in answering it, will not wish you had made it larger. Pray not for crutches but for wings."

--Phillips Brooks

**John Eadie** writes that "God is able to do far "above what we ask," for our asking is limited and feeble. John 16:24 (*Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.*"). But there may be thoughts too sweeping for expression, there may be unutterable groanings prompted by the Spirit (Ro 8:26-note -- "*And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words*"). And yet above and beyond our widest conceptions and most daring expectations is God "able to do." God's ability to answer prayer transcends not only our spoken petitions, but far surpasses even such thoughts as are too big for words, and too deep for utterance. And still those desires which are dumb from their very vastness, and amazing from their very boldness, are insignificant requests compared with the power of God. For we know so little of His promises, and so weak is our faith in them, that we ask not, as we should, for their universal fulfilment; and though we did understand their depth and power, our loftiest imaginations of possible blessing would come infinitely short of the power and resources of the Hearer of prayer. ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

**O'Brien** has an insightful note writing that "The apostle Paul was accustomed to asking God for extravagant blessings on behalf of his Christian readers (see **notes** Philippians 1:9; Philippians 4:19; Colossians 1:9; 1:10; 1:11; 1:12; 1:13; 1:14; 1Th 3:12; 2Th 1:3; cf. 1Co 1:5). Here he has just petitioned the Father for spiritual blessings of extraordinary value, including the request that they might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Armitage Robinson writes of this petition: No prayer that has ever been framed has uttered a bolder request. Has the apostle, then, gone over the top? No, for it is impossible to ask for too much since the Fathers giving exceeds their capacity for asking or even imagining. ([The Letter to the Ephesians. W. B. Eerdmans](#))

**Boice** comments that "When Paul says **"we"** he includes himself. He is saying that even he, the great apostle, cannot fully understand or even imagine all that God is going to do for us. But Paul does know that God can do it. And not only is God able to do it, he is able to do it "immeasurably," which means indefinitely. ([Boice, J. M.: Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary](#))

**Arthur T. Pierson** once said that there is a sevenfold measure of the power of God is Paul's benediction. First, God's able to do first what we ask. Second, He is able to do all that we ask. Third, He is able to do what we think. Fourth, He is able to do all that we think. Fifth, He is able to do above all that we ask or think. Sixth, He is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think. And seventh, He is able to do exceeding, abundant above all that we could ask or think. Now what do we need? Hallelujah and Amen is all that's left to say!

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**Able** ([1410](#)) (**dunamai**) means to be capable of, to have power by virtue of inherent ability (one's own ability) and resources. Dunamai expresses ability and capacity to accomplish something in deed, attitude, or thought. This refers to God's ability to do literally "above all things". Uses in Ephesians - Eph. 3:4 (you **can** understand my insight); Eph. 3:20; Eph. 6:11 (Put on the full armor of God, so that **you will be able** to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.); Eph. 6:13 (take up the full armor of God, so that **you will be able** to resist in the evil day); Eph. 6:16 (taking up the shield of faith with which **you will be able** to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.)

**To do** ([4160](#)) (**poieo**) means to accomplish (as it is related to the undertaking of actions or bringing about states or conditions) expressing an action as continued or not yet completed. Uses in Ephesians - Eph. 1:16; Eph. 2:3 ("**indulging**"); Eph. 2:14 ("He Himself is our peace Who **made** both one."); Eph. 2:15 ("**establishing** peace"); Eph. 3:11 ("He **carried out** in Christ"); Eph. 3:20; Eph. 4:16 ("**causes** the growth"); Eph. 6:6 ("**doing** the will of God"); Eph. 6:8 ("each one **does**, this he will receive back from the Lord"); Eph. 6:9 ("masters **do** the same");

**Abundantly beyond** (**Huperekperissou** from **huper** = over, above + **ek** = out of, intensifies meaning, adding idea of inexhaustible + **perissos** = above measure, exceeding some number or measure, over and above, more than necessary) means "exceedingly above and beyond all measure," surpassing, superabundantly, surpassingly, beyond measure, exceedingly, quite beyond all measure, overwhelming, over and above, more than enough. This heightened form of comparative almost defies any single, simple English translation. It describes an extraordinary degree, involving a considerable excess over what would be expected. **Huperekperissou** is the the highest form of comparison imaginable and so means immeasurably more than, quite beyond all measure, infinitely more than. **FF Bruce** calls this "one of Paul's coined 'super-superlatives.'" **Vincent** say this is "One of the numerous compounds of **huper** - beyond, over and above, of which Paul is fond. Of 28 words compounded with this preposition in the New Testament, Paul alone uses 20." (See related note by Ralph Earle)

**Huperekperissou** is found only 3 times in all the Bible (Eph 3:20; 1Th 3:10; 5:13) with no uses in the Septuagint

For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying **most earnestly** (huperekperissou - praying with extreme earnestness, pray as earnestly as possible) that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? (1Th 3:9-10-note)

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge

over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them **very highly** (huperekperissou) in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. (1Th 5:12-13-note)

**Ask** (154) (**aiteo**) means to ask for something to be given with a sense of urgency and even to the point of demanding. **Aiteo** reflects a request of one's will means to ask for, with a claim on receipt of an answer. Note the use **middle voice** which conveys the idea of asking for one's self or in one's own interest.

**Think** (3539) (**noieo** from **noús** = the mind) means to direct one's mind to a subject, and speak of rational reflection of thought, clear perception, full understanding, and careful consideration. It means to perceive with thought coming into consciousness as distinct from the perception of senses.

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#### Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask - An **Illustration**:

A preacher once lamented to the renowned preacher C H Spurgeon...

"Mr. Spurgeon, I am seeing very few people saved."

To which Spurgeon replied with a question

"Do you expect to see folk saved every time you preach?"

The preacher answered

"Why, no".

To which Spurgeon wisely quipped

"That's why you don't!"

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#### Immeasurably More

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. —1 John 4:4

Today's Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21

"It's not going to happen, Aunt Julie. You might as well erase that thought from your mind."

"I know it's unlikely," I said. "But it's not impossible."

For several years, my niece and I have had variations of that conversation regarding a situation in our family. The rest of the sentence, which I said only occasionally, was this: "I know it can happen because I hear stories all the time about how God makes impossible things happen." The part of the sentence I said only to myself was this: "But they happen only in other people's families."

Recently my pastor has been preaching from the book of Ephesians. At the end of every service we say this benediction: "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21 niv).

This was the year God chose to do "immeasurably more" in my family. He replaced indifference with love. How did He do it? Beats me. But I saw it happen. And why should I be surprised? If Satan can turn love into indifference, certainly God can change indifference back into love. By: Julie Ackerman Link ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, thank You for doing immeasurably more in our lives than we could ever imagine.

I am so thankful that You are able and often do make impossible situations possible.

God's power to restore is stronger than Satan's power to destroy.

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**ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKS WITHIN US: kata ten dunamin ten energoumenen (PMPFSA) en hemin:**

- **According to the power that works within us**- Ep 3:7; 1:19; Col 1:29
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

- [Ephesians 3:18-21 The Fullness of God, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 The Christian Turn-on](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 Experiencing the Power of Christ](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:20-21 God is Able!](#) - Steven Cole

## ACCORDING TO HIS RESURRECTION POWER

**According to the power** ([dunamis](#)) **that works** ([energeo](#)) **within us** - Note first that **according to** ([kata](#)) means in proportion to God's infinite riches! God is not stingily. This is not just a portion of power but a proportion! If I am a billionaire and I give you ten dollars, I have given you a portion (very small portion at that) out of my riches. But if I give you ten million dollars, I have given to you **according to** or more proportionate to my true wealth. The first giver would take it out of His riches and would be like Mr. Rockefeller who used to give his caddy a dime. God is not like Mr. Rockefeller, in either his wealth or generosity! Note that this power continuously ([energeo](#) in the present tense) works within us. It's an "inside job!" What is the **power** that works within us? It is supernatural [dunamis](#) power. **Works** refers to the mighty power of continuous sanctification at work in the believer's heart, and He will accomplish His work! The Spirit of Jesus is in us and He is the One Who gives us the supernatural **power**! It follows that we need to seek to be continually filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18+) that we might be able to continually walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16+)!

**Expositor's** writes that "God's capacity to meet his people's spiritual needs far exceeds anything they can either request in prayer or conceive by way of anticipation (Philippians 4:7). It is actualized through his power (dynamis), which continually operates ([energoumenen](#)) within the lives of believers. ([Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Blaikie reminds us that this power** is none other than the **power** "which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:20). The **power** that is actually at work in us has only to be exerted a little more to accomplish wonders of sanctification, and confer on us immense spiritual strength. ([Pulpit Commentary](#))

**John Piper** - Do you see the parallel with the power of God in verse 20? In verse 19 he says that the **love of Christ** for the church goes beyond what you can know, and in verse 20 he say that the **power** of God over the church goes beyond what you can think. When the massive weather front of God's love meets the massive weather front of God's power in the heart of a believer it produces a hurricane of confidence called 'Gloria'-- a powerful doxology: 'To him be GLORY in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen.' ([Far More Than You Think](#))

**Alexander Maclaren** - What power is that but the power of the Spirit of God dwelling in us? And thus we have the measure, or standard, set forth in terms respectively applying to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. For the first, the riches of His glory; for the second, His Resurrection and Ascension; for the third, His energy working in Christian souls. The first carries us up into the mysteries of God, where the air is almost too subtle for our gross lungs; the second draws nearer to earth and points us to an historical fact that happened in this everyday world; the third comes still nearer to us, and bids us look within, and see whether what we are conscious of there, if we interpret it by the light of these other measures, will not yield results as great as theirs, and open before us the same fair prospect of perfect holiness and conformity to the divine nature. ([Sermon](#))

But the saint limits the working of God in and through him by the degree of his yieldedness to the Spirit  
-- Kenneth Wuest

**Wuest** explains that "God is able to do for us and answer our prayers according to the efficiency, richness, and power of the working of the Spirit in our lives. **This latter is determined by the yieldedness of the believer to the Holy Spirit.** Thus, the saint determines what God is able to do for him. In His inherent ability, there is no limit to what God can do in and through the saint. But the saint limits the working of God in and through him by the degree of his yieldedness to the Spirit. ([Word Studies - Eerdman Publishing Company Volume 1, Volume 2, Volume 3](#))

### According to the Power

If our scanty measure were used,  
How poor were the gifts of the Lord;  
If our cups of thought and our pitchers of prayer  
Were all that His love could afford.

But - above all our stammering tongues  
Can voice of our deepest desire,  
Abundant above all the pitiful good  
To which our small minds can aspire;



Exceeding abundant above  
The reach of our groveling thought;  
So great is the fulness of knowledge and grace  
His power to usward hath wrought.  
-- Annie Johnson Flint

**S Lewis Johnson** - My dear Christian friends, do you know that right at this moment, when you feel so lethargic, when you say when is Dr. Johnson going to finish, two minutes from now, when you say the word of God can sometimes be so boring, and when you berate yourself for not being as responsive as you ought to be, the Holy Spirit is working constantly in your heart. He works in every believer, and he works toward the sanctification of every one of us, and let me tell you this, he will accomplish his work. You're going to be like Christ, some day. It may be a great earth-shaking transformation when it occurs for some of us [laughter], but it's going to happen. We are going to be like him. ([Ephesians 3:14-21 Prayer for the Realization of God](#))

**Peter O'Brien** - In the earlier petition of chapter 1, God's effective power towards believers (Ep 1:19-note) was said to be nothing less than the operation of His mighty strength exerted in the resurrection of Christ (Ep 1:20-note). Now that same power which raised Christ from the dead, enthroned Him in the heavenlies, and then raised and enthroned us with Him, is at work within us to achieve infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. In the doxology, Paul thus praises God for the bestowal of strength by His Spirit on His people, and affirms that the full realization of God's gracious purposes for them and in them becomes possible. ([O'Brien, P. T. The Letter to the Ephesians. W. B. Eerdmans. 1999](#))

**Eadie** adds that Paul is saying "According to His power that proves or shows itself at work in us." That power has been again and again referred to in itself and in its results by the apostle. (Ep 1:19-note, Ep 3:16-note) From our own blissful experience of what it has already achieved in us, we may gather that its Divine possessor and wielder can do for us "far beyond what we ask or think." That might (or power) being God's, can achieve in us results which the boldest have not ventured to anticipate. ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** sums up this section - The word **'power'** is again **dunamis**, which we met back in Ephesians 3:7; and "working" is **energeia** (energy) found in Ephesians 1:11, 1:19; 2:2; 3:7; and Ep 4:16 (see notes Eph 1:11, 1:19; 2:2; 3:7; and 4:16). Some power is dormant; it is available, but not being used, such as the power stored in a battery. But God's energy is effectual power—power at work in our lives. This power works in us, in the inner man (Ep 3:16-note). Philippians 2:12-13 are parallel verses, so be sure to read them. (So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. - See notes Philippians 2:12; 2:13) **It is the Holy Spirit Who releases the resurrection power of Christ in our lives.** (many Christians) have been cut off from their source of power. Unbelief, unconfessed sin, careless living, worldliness in action or attitude—all of these can rob us of power (ED: cf Ep 4:30, 1Th 5:19). **And a Christian robbed of power cannot be used of God** "Without Me, ye can do (ABSOLUTELY) nothing (OF ETERNAL VALUE)" (John 15:5)...Get your hands on your spiritual wealth by opening your heart to the Holy Spirit, and praying with Paul for strength for the inner man... for a new depth of love... for spiritual apprehension... and for spiritual fullness. **"Ye have not because ye ask not"** (James 4:2+). (See [The Wiersbe Bible Commentary](#))

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**Ruth Paxson** adds that "God has revealed our immeasurable wealth in Christ, and has led us to offer petition after petition for its realization. While the words have fallen from our lips have we been saying secretly in our hearts, "It cannot be done; anyhow, it cannot be done in me"? Whoever looks within at himself for this power, or around at others, however spiritual they may be, may rightly say that it is impossible. But there is another way to look-up to Him who has promised that His own mighty power will work in us for the realization of our riches in Christ. ([The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian](#))

### 3:20

Able

Able to do

Able to do what we ask

Able to do what we think

Able to do what we ask or think

Able to do all that we ask or think

Able to do above all that we ask or think

Able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think

Able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think

**"Unto him"** -- The Purposer is the Promiser, who is also the Performer. Look unto Him, our Rich, Resourceful, Reliable Father.

**"That is able to do."** Our petition, however great, can never exceed God's ability to grant. Through God's power every saint has been lifted from the deepest depths in sin to the highest heights in Christ; he has been incorporated into Christ as a member of His Body and made the habitation of God. Surely the God who has had power to thus save and sanctify him can now strengthen him with power, that His purpose for the saint may be fully realized. What God has commenced He will surely consummate.

**"All that we ask or think."** What petitions have we asked? What desires have flooded our hearts that we dared not voice? Is it possible He has power to do "all" for us? Yes, "above all"; still God's power has scarcely been tapped: "abundantly above all"; surely the limit of even God's power has been reached. No, not yet; "exceeding abundantly above all." And yet God's power is not exhausted, for He continues to give even after we stop asking and only harbour the unuttered thought; yet still there remains a vast residue of power unused after unbelief has stopped our asking and stifled our thinking, -- "above all that we ask or think."

**"According to the power that worketh in us."** The Promiser provides the power. The power is a Person—none other than God's own Spirit, who abides in us to make Christ real and regnant, and thereby ensure to us the realization of our wealth in Christ. The indwelling Spirit is God's pledge of His limitless power to do.

**"That worketh in us."** If God is able to work with such superabundant, limitless power, why does He not do it? Why do we see so few Christians who seem to have drunk of the fountain of the fulness of God? There is but one possible answer. The limitless power of God is limited by the unwillingness to have it work, or by the unbelief that it can. But in the light of this prayer could there be a greater sin in the life of a saint than to live on the lower level of the carnal when God's provision and power make possible life on the highest plane of the spiritual? Someone has tersely said: "You have your Bible and your knees; use them." Let us use them so that these treasures in Christ may become in fullest measure current coin in our lives.

The presence of God -- abiding

The plenitude of God -- abounding

The power of God -- achieving

This realized through prayer in the Christian's life is the sum total of his vast wealth in Christ. (The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian)

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**Power** (1411) (**dunamis** - words derived from the stem **duna**— all have the basic meaning of "being able," of "capacity" in virtue of an ability and is root for our English "dynamic") defines inherent power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature. This is that omnipotence that raised Christ from the dead and quickened us when we were dead in sins. Some power is dormant; it is available, but not being used, such as the power stored in a battery. But God's energy is effectual power—power at work in our lives. This power works in us, in the inner man (Ep 3:16+).

**Works** (1754) (**energeo** from **en** = in + **érgon** = work) (See also related noun **energeia**) means to be effective in causing something to happen. It means to bring something about through use of capability. It means to act, to be operative or to be at work. **Energeo** is in the present tense which pictures the continual activity of the Spirit in this present evil age. Praise God!

**Within** (1722) (**en**) Paul is saying this is an "inside" job and the power that is putting forth energy in us, is the operation of the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification.

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**SPLASH BALL** - Behind right field of San Francisco's AT&T Park is McCovey Cove, where fans sit in their boats & kayaks, waiting for a splash ball. So, this phrase exceedingly abundantly isn't hitting the baseball over the fence, nor deep into the stands, but knocking it out of the park...this here is God's splash ball!

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**Brian Bell** on exceeding abundantly...

**God gives us more than we ask:**

- Abraham – said, I can't expect Sarah to bear a child in her old age. God promised a seed. It must be in this child of Hagar. Oh that Ishmael might live before You.
- God granted him that, but He gave him Isaac as well, & all the blessings of the covenant.



- David – in Ps.21:4 David asked life from God. And God gave him more than length of days for himself, but a throne for his sons throughout all generations.
- Man w/palsy friends brought him to Jesus & asked for a physical healing. Jesus said, 1st healed him spiritually, son...your sins are forgiven. Then healed him physically.

### God gives greater things than we ask for.

- Dying thief – asked, Lord, remember me. Jesus' reply, today you will be with me in paradise.
- The Prodigal – I'm not worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants. His father answered: Bring forth the best robe & put it on him; put a ring on his hand, & sandals on his feet.

Once you get into the position of an asker, you shall have what you never asked for & never thought to receive. Spurgeon

**Our Daily Bread** - At the time of his death in 1956, Jim Elliot was trying to reach the Auca Indians of South America for Christ. Just three years earlier, after watching an Indian die in a jungle hut, he had affirmed his willingness to serve God and die if necessary among these people. Then he added this petition: "Lord, let me live until I have declared Thy works to this generation." Jim Elliot didn't expect God to answer his prayer by letting him be speared to death before he was thirty years old. But neither did he have any idea that within three years his name would be known all over the world and that his journals would challenge many to give themselves to the Lord's service. He's been in heaven for more than thirty years, but he is still "speaking" to thou-sands of people.

God loves us deeply and listens to our prayers, but He doesn't always give us exactly what we ask. Since He "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think," we can be sure that if He doesn't fulfill all our requests it's because He wants to give us some-thing better.

When we don't receive everything we ask for, we need not be discouraged. God loves us and delights in giving us what we desire. But He also knows the end from the beginning, and sometimes He says no in order to give us something better. When we reach heaven, we will find that He did indeed answer our petitions "exceedingly abundantly above" all our fondest hopes and dreams. —H. V. Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God always gives us what we ask for—or something better.

God's answers are often wiser than our prayers.

### Spurgeon wrote...

God will give us much more than we ask. Abraham thought, "I cannot expect that Sarah will bear a child in her old age. God has promised me a seed, and surely it must be this child of Hagar. 'O that Ishmael might live before thee' " (Gen. 17:18). God granted him that, but he gave him Isaac as well, and all the blessings of the covenant.

There is Jacob. He kneels down to pray, and asks the Lord to give him bread to eat and raiment to put on. But what did his God give him? When he came back to Bethel he had two bands, thou-sands of sheep and camels, and much wealth.

It is said of David, "The king asked life of thee, and thou gayest him length of days for ever and ever" (Ps 21:4). He gave him not only length of days himself, but a throne for his sons throughout all generations.

"Well," say you, "but is that true of New Testament prayers?"

Yes, it is so with New Testament pleaders, whether saints or sinners. They brought a man to Christ sick of the palsy and asked him to heal him, and he said, "Son ... thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). He had not asked that, had he? No, but God gives greater things than we ask for.

Hear that poor dying thief's humble prayer, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Jesus replies, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). He had not dreamed of such an honor.

Even the story of the prodigal teaches us this. He resolved to say, "I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:19). What was the answer? "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his hands, and shoes on his feet" (Luke 15:22). Once you get into the position of an asker, you shall have what you never asked for, and never thought to receive.

## Ask ...

Ask

All that we ask

Above all that we ask or think

Abundantly above all that we ask or think

Exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think

Able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

Source unknown ([Bible.org](http://Bible.org))

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**Worrier Or Warrior?** - A missionary wrote a newsletter to thank his supporters for being "prayer warriors." Because of a typing error, though, he called them "prayer worriers. " For some of us, that might be a good description.

In his book *Growing Your Soul*, Neil Wiseman writes, "Prayer must be more than a kind of restatement of fretting worries or a mulling over of problems. Our petitions must move beyond gloomy desperation, which deals mostly with calamity and despair."

During an anxious time in my life, I became a "prayer worrier." I would beg, "Lord, please keep my neighbor from causing me problems tomorrow." Or, "Father, don't let that ornery person spread gossip about me."

But then the Lord taught me to pray for people, rather than against them. I began to say, "Lord, bless and encourage my neighbor, and help him to sense Your love." Then I watched to see what God would do. The Lord's amazing answers not only helped others but also helped to cure my own anxiety!

Paul was no "prayer worrier." He prayed for God's people that they might know the strength, love, and fullness of God, who is able to do far more than we can ask or even think (Ephesians 3:14-21). Such confidence made Paul a true "prayer warrior." Are your prayers like that? —Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

As we resolve to live for Christ  
In actions, words, and deeds,  
We'll yield our anxious hearts to Him  
And pray for others' needs. —Branon

Fervent prayer dispels anxious care.

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**More Than Enough** - It was an unexpected provision in a time of need. The prophet Elisha, like others in Israel, was hard-pressed by the famine. But the prophet determined that he must share with other needy Israelites the 20 loaves of barley bread he had just received (2Ki 4:42, 43, 44). Elisha's servant questioned the wisdom of setting the food before 100 hungry men, for there was not enough to go around.

Nevertheless, Elisha issued a command to feed his fellow prophets, adding a promise that this scanty provision would be enough: "Thus says the Lord: 'They shall eat and have some left over'" (2Ki 4:43).

True to God's word, when Elisha's servant set the loaves before the people, "they ate and had some left over" (2Ki 4:44). There was enough—and more than enough. A similar thing happened when Jesus fed 5,000 with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish (John 6:1-14). These examples suggest the principle: When God gives, He is able to give more than enough.

When we sense that God is asking us to serve Him in a new or unfamiliar way, we should never say no simply because we feel inadequate. "We have only a few loaves," we may say. But the Lord replies, "Trust Me. They are more than enough." —D H R ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

What matter though our loaves be few?  
Alike the little and the much  
When He shall add to what we have  
His multiplying touch. —Flint

**We always have enough  
when God is our supply.**

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**No Hands But His** - Jennifer had just heard a disturbing report about an increase in cases of depression among women. The report

cited a related upswing in alcoholism and an increased reliance on prescription drugs.

"So what are You doing about it, Lord?" Jennifer prayed. But the more she thought about it, the more she felt that God was asking her to do something. All she could see, however, were her own limitations.

To help her think it through, she listed some reasons that were keeping her from action: shyness, fear of getting involved, lack of time, a cold heart, feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure--a daunting list!

As she finished her list, she saw that it was time to pick up her children from school. She put on her coat, then reached for her gloves. They were lying limp and useless--until she slipped her hands inside them. At that moment she realized that God didn't want her to think about her limitations. Rather, He wanted to put His power into her and work through her, just as her gloves became useful when she put her hands into them.

Why do we feel inadequate for the work God has given us? He wants to love others through us, "according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20). --J E Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The Lord will give you help and strength  
For work He bids you do;  
To serve Him from a heart of love  
Is all He asks of you. --Fasick

**God's call to a task includes  
His strength to complete it.**

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### **Surprised By God**

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. — Ephesians 3:20

Today's Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21

After 10 years of renting in a charming location, we discovered that our landlord suddenly needed to sell the house. I asked God to change the circumstances and make it possible for my wife and me to stay in this place we'd made home, where we'd watched our children grow up. But God said no.

When it comes to my needs, I worry that I'm asking for the wrong thing or that I'm not worthy of the request I'm making. But God's no doesn't need to shake our faith when we're grounded—surrounded I like to say—in His love. In Ephesians 3, Paul understood that those who know the love of Christ intimately (vv.16-17) can trust God to have a loving reason for saying no.

Shortly after hearing "no" from God about my request, friends from church offered to rent us a home they were vacating. Our new location—with new appliances, new plumbing, new electrical wiring, and an extra bedroom—sits on the ocean, an idyllic scene of ships, sails, and sounds that daily remind us that God is bigger than any issue we face. Our loving Father used loving friends to give more than we asked.

Whether God gives us more than we imagined or far less than we desired, we can trust that His plans are much better than ours. By: Randy Kilgore ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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**J R Miller** - It is a comfort to us to know, when we pray, that God is able to do for us all that we ask. Paul tells us that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. This is not saying that He will actually give us everything we ask for. We ask sometimes for very unfit things. We think they would supply our wants, or satisfy our heart-hungers, or give us the joy we lack. But really they would not. Perhaps they would do us harm.

God will not give us these things, no matter how earnestly we ask for them. We may plead to have some impending trouble or burden averted. God is able to do it - we are sure of this. But it may be that His love for us requires that we bear the burden or endure the sorrow. We may be sure; therefore, that there is nothing we may ask which God could not do. If He does not do what we wish, we know that it is better it should not be done.

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**Wayne Barber** comments on Paul's "mountain top" conclusion to his great prayer declaring that...

Paul makes a statement here that to me is the crux of everything that he has prayed so far. He says,

### **"to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly."**

How many times have you heard that verse quoted? How many times have you heard it quoted in context? People just reach out and say, "Oh, God can do it." Well, there is no question about that, friend. If you have got a question as to whether He can, then you just need to meet Christ and get saved. Yes, He can do it. We know that. That is not the problem.

**When does He manifest that ability? When does He move in and do those things that are exceeding abundantly beyond what we ask or think?**

I'll tell you when.

**When the Holy Spirit has empowered us, when Christ has indwelt us, when His love has mastered us and when His fullness has filled us.**

Look out. Here come the exceeding abundantly great things of God's ability that begin to be manifest in our life.

**There are conditions to be met before you start claiming this verse.** That is why Paul's prayer went so long before he ever said anything about it. It is an ability beyond our comprehension. Do you know what? This verse hinges on the whole prayer that Paul has prayed. Do you know what that says to me? That says we are limiting God from doing those things which are far exceeding and abundantly beyond what we even ask or even think. Why? Because we won't quit playing games at the foot of the cross. That phrase has stuck with me. We would rather play church and talk about it than we would to tap into it. We would rather have fear and bondage and worry and everything else holding us hostage instead of being dominated by the everlasting Spirit of the living God.

How do we limit God? Folks, we limit what He wants to do in and through our lives. Do you think He won't get it done? Oh, yes. But He will use somebody else. Oh, He will get it done, but we are missing out on what God wants to do in and through our lives. He wants to draw us into what He is up to. There are so many people who would rather be dominated by their own self-pity than they would the living God who offers all of this abundance in our life.

**When we cooperate with Him and allow His Spirit to fill us and Christ to indwell us and His love to master us, that's when it takes place.**

Remember, Jesus made a statement to the disciples in the gospel of John. He pointed out some of the things He had done and then He said,

**"Greater works than these shall you do." (Jn 14:12)**

Oh, I trust that you will study that and not just rip a verse out and run out in the street and think that you are going to do something beyond what Christ can do. There is a beautiful thought here. He is allowing us to be a part of what He is still doing. Folks, you will never in quality surpass what God can do. When He came, He limited Himself to a body. That was the purpose. That body would die on the cross. What Jesus was saying to His disciples was,

"My Spirit is going to be in you. He is going to give you a divine ability. You will not be left as orphans. I am coming to you if you will just simply cooperate, not in quality, but in quantity. Greater works than what you have seen here you shall do." (cp Acts 1:8)

What are we hindering God from? We are limiting Him because we are not willing to let the Spirit of God enable us. Let's take the verse apart and just see what God will show us.

### **"Now to Him who is able..."**

**"Is"** is in the **present tense** middle voice. Present tense means that He is able, is always able, has always been able and will always be able. There is never a question about His divine ability.

The Greek verb **dunamai** is from the root word **dunamis**. God has the divine capacity and ability that we don't have. And the **middle voice** means on His own He chooses to be able in you and in me.

**Well, what is the problem?** We are not choosing for Him to be able in us. We would rather do it ourselves than we would confess to Him that we can't and tap into that which He can do. God has offered Himself and His ability to each of His children. This ability is completely available in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who lives within us.

He is able! He has chosen to make Himself available to you and me. I will tell you what He is trying to do. I think He is trying to raise a level of faith where we can stand on what God says, not on what people think or the opinions of man.

**Do you know what they used to do in the Psalms?** They used to celebrate the victory before they ever went to the battle. That

looks kind of dumb to me. I mean, they would get together before they even went out to battle and have a victory celebration. Then they went out. These pictures were given as a shadow of the truth which comes to full light in the New Testament.

Friend, **we don't work toward victory**. It is not like a basketball game when there is three seconds left and we shoot and win. That is not victory. **Victory was at the cross**. We don't ever go towards it! We come from it!

We walk in victory.

Victory is not us overcoming anything.

Victory is Jesus overcoming us and indwelling us  
and His spirit empowering us with His divine ability.

**That is real victory!**

We have got to learn that He is able; always has been, always will be. No question there. He has chosen to make Himself available to you and me.

Well, he goes on to say, "to do exceeding abundantly beyond."

The Greek word used here (*huperekperissou*) is made up of three words: *huper*, which means above, *ek*, which means a standard or a measure, and *perisseuo*, which means over and above more than enough. So, it is like the writer, Paul, writing in the Greek, was trying to express something that there were no words to express. Paul was saying, "He is able to do over and above and over and above and more than enough and over and above that."

God can do it! I like "exceeding abundantly beyond." That brings it down to where my feeble mind can grab hold of it. Do you realize the failures in our life are never because of God, never, never, never? **They are the consequence of our unwillingness to bow before Him**. We limit His power which has been offered to us. We limit His divine ability to do through us what we could have never imagined possible.

Well, he is exceedingly able to do over and above and beyond "all that we ask or think." Perhaps you are inquisitive like I am. I began to think about this. When I am filled with the Spirit of God, God is the one who governs my thoughts. When I am filled with the Spirit of God, God is the one who governs my requests. Everything I am asking of Him He has already put on my heart. So therefore, He wants to do more and more and more and more beyond anything I have ever asked or beyond anything I have even dared to think. Folks, just think how far we can move into this, of His divine ability within us, to reach a lost world for Christ, to touch a world that doesn't understand the divine ability that God wants to show them in Jesus Christ.

**"All that we ask or think."**

How many people does God want to call to reach the world for Christ? How many people does God want to start getting involved in missions and getting the money out there where it is needed? Listen, we haven't even dared ask Him yet. We haven't even dared to think about it yet because we are not living in the fullness of what God already offers. Oh yes, He is able, but we will never tap into that great truth until we start learning to be indwelt by Christ and empowered by His Spirit and mastered by His love. Folks, when God gets hold of **surrendered** people, then He manifests His divine ability and the results are absolutely incredible!

We love to claim this verse. "God is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all you ask or think."

What does that mean? I don't have a clue, but it sounds good. God is able to do exceeding abundantly. Folks, until the conditions are met, you might just as well forget the phrase because you will never know that ability. There are some things God is going to have you ask Him and think about asking Him that are far beyond anything you have ever thought before, because you haven't gone that far in the Lord Jesus, in His fullness. Greater works than these shall you do. God says if we will tap into Him, He will give us the ability to do it.

Well, we have come to the final thing in Ep 3:21: "to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever."

Paul says a similar thing in Philippians. He wrote these letters in the same imprisonment. Let's go over there and see. Look in Philippians 3:3. He is saying here to give all the glory now to the Lord Jesus in the church. He says something that really caught my attention. He says, "we are the *true* circumcision..."

What does he mean? We are not circumcised of the flesh because the covenant we are under is not an external covenant. It is an internal covenant. We are circumcised of the heart: "...who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

In other words, Paul is saying here to Him be the glory in the church. Do you mean the only way to give Him glory in the church is to glorify only Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh? That is exactly right. How can we go on and give Him the glory? We keep on lifting up Jesus Christ. We don't praise men. We praise God. Every time we have a problem we don't get involved in all that stuff. We come before Him and say, "God, what are you up to?" Then God is glorified. Man is not, but God is.

Then Paul finishes the prayer and says, "Amen." Do you know what that means? It means "let it be so." It just sort of seals it.

What a prayer! There is just so much in it. Let me show you something. This prayer sums up everything he said in chapters 1-3 and sets up everything he is about to say in chapters 4-6. Look at Eph 4:1 "I, therefore."

When there is a "therefore," look and see what it is there for. You now know what it is there for. You have the divine ability of God. All the fullness of God has been offered to you and me, not to go out and raise the dead, but to go out and manifest the character of Jesus in our life and be about the things that God has told us.

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."  
Amen.

Anything less than what we have seen prayed in this prayer is nothing more than mere religion. God's power wants to flow. Why would God lead us into a wilderness? Because He wants to take us on into "Canaan" of His blessing. His divine power is waiting for us, folks. Don't you let a negative thought go through your mind. We have a God who so supersedes our problems, it would blow us all away. He is just waiting on us to shape up and start living in the truth that we already know but have not yet tapped into.

The word we get the word dynamite from is *dunamis*, which is the word we are studying. God is able. We translate it power, strengthened with power in the inner man. We sing a song about the fact that there is

"Power, power, wonder working power, in the blood of the Lamb.  
There is power, power, wonder working power  
in the precious blood of the Lamb."

Oh, folks, can you hear what you are singing? God wants to turn it loose in your life even now, but you have got to deal with the sin that is clogged up. It is all there. It has been offered to you freely, but we have got to get the sin out so the power can flow one more time. We can rise up and call Him blessed and touch this world for Jesus Christ. That is what He is wanting to do and we are all a part of this. (Ephesians 3:17-21 by Wayne Barber)

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## John MacArthur - THE MOTIVE OF THE CHURCH

To Him be glory in the church. EPHESIANS 3:21

If you were to survey a group of people and ask them to name the primary purpose of the church, you would probably get a variety of answers.

Some might suggest that the church is a place to form friendships with godly people. It's where believers strengthen each other in faith and where love is cultivated and shared.

Others might suggest that the mission of the church is teaching the Word, training believers for various responsibilities, and instructing children and young people with the purpose of helping them mature in Christ.

Still others might say that another purpose of the church is to praise God. The church is a community of praise that exalts God for who He is and what He has done. Some would suggest that since praise is the central activity of heaven, it must also be the primary responsibility of those on earth.

But as important as fellowship, teaching, and praise are, the primary motive of the church is to glorify God. The apostle Paul described salvation as being "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. 1:6). ([Truth for Today](#))

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**ILLUSTRATION** - A woman once approached the famous preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, after he spoke and asked, "Do you think we should pray for even the little things in our lives, or just for the big things?" In his dignified British manner he replied, "Madam, can you think of *anything* in your life that is big to God?"

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**G Campbell Morgan - (Eph. 3:21.) "Unto Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations forever and ever."**



Briefly stated then, the vocation of the Church, beyond all the preparation of this life, beyond that intermediate state in which some now are, in that time when the Church shall be completed and complete, is to reveal the grace and wisdom of God to the beings of other dwelling places, the high unfallen ones of the heavenlies, and that not to one age only, but to the ages of the ages as they are known only to the mind of God. In all eternity that great "Now" of God embracing our "past" and "future," there has been no such proof of the grace of His heart and the wisdom of His workings as that of the ransoming and uplifting in spotless purity of fallen man, and those so ransomed and uplifted are to be the witnesses to the great future of intelligence concerning wondrous and overwhelming truths. What an enormous range of possibility does this view of the Church's future open up before our vision. Our finite surroundings make it impossible for us to comprehend all the infinite spaces that appear only to us as blue sky, or darkling night. What worlds are there, what high forms of pure spirits, what spaces still beyond, and what yet deeper spheres of habitable places. Thought is bewildered at the daring of its own flight. Then what changes and movements among all these in the procession of the ages. Remember that to these worlds and these beings and these ages we are to be the messengers of the grace and wisdom and glory of God. In that view the future loses its sense of dread, and one looks on to the new opportunities for art, and music, and poetry, and above all perchance of preaching, that are coming to the ransomed ones when the discipline of time is merged into the fitness of eternity, with reverent and holy desire.

Some one may say that is pure imagining. Well it certainly is imagination well within the limit of the possibilities of these words of the apostle, who had been caught up into the third heaven and had seen things unutterable.

**Mark how he closes this section.**

**(Eph. 3:20, 21.) "Now unto Him that is able TO DO exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or THINK, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him, be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations forever and ever."**

So that the wildest flights of thought are far short of the possibilities of what God is able "to do."

This is but a faint glimpse then of the glory of which Paul said "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to usward" (Rom. 8:18), but it is enough to turn the heart of the disciple with fuller purpose of consecration to that Beloved One who with a perfect knowledge of that future, too splendid yet for our comprehension, is teaching and training us ever with that in view.

How better can we close this contemplation of discipleship, in its beginning, progress and consummation, than in the words of Paul to these Ephesians (4:1). "I therefore ... beseech you to walk worthy of the VOCATION wherewith ye were called."

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## **God's Power At Work In Us Ephesians 3:20, 21 - Floyd Strater**

I like the King James Version for this: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding ... abundantly ... above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end."

### **I. The power of God has no limit**

- A. The flood.
  - 1. Did not just happen but was planned and announced to Noah at least 120 years before it happened.
  - 2. God controlled the rain and the fountains of the earth.
  - 3. His hatred of sin was shown in His power. This was not to hurt man but to preserve mankind from the destruction of sin.
- B. We still see His power today by the rainbow as a continuing covenant with man that He will not destroy the world with water.
- C. Jonah within the big fish.
  - 1. Jonah thought he could run away from God, but he was wrong, for there is no hiding place.
  - 2. He learned how to pray from the belly of a fish in the covering of deep water, and God heard.

D. God caused the sun to stand still for Joshua (Joshua 10:12-14). "On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: 'O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the valley of Ajialon.' so the sun stood still, and the moon stopped till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!"

### **II. The Power of God works within us**

- A. God's power is at work through us.
- B. The channel of our life must be spiritually clear so His power can flow through us.
- C. As individual Christians and as a church body we limit ourselves and truly believe that we cannot do anything.
  - 1. With God's awesome power at our disposal there is no limit as to what can be done.
  - 2. "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).
- D. Jesus made a promise that we have never dared to explore.
  - 1. "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these" (John 14:12).
  - 2. Jesus dealt with all kinds of sickness, but we have the power through His resurrection to deal with the souls of men and make them alive in Christ for ever and ever.
  - 3. Why get excited about healing a body for 20 years when we can heal the soul for eternity?
- E. The God-fearing church that is open to the indwelling power of God can:
  - 1. Try the impossible.
    - a. Gideon with 300 men accomplished the impossible.
    - b. David accomplished the impossible against Goliath in the name of the Lord.
  - 2. Take risks. We can be bold and sometimes impractical and unreasonable by human standards.
- F. When you try something big, just make sure that there is no way it can happen except by the power of God.
- G. Following the resurrection of Jesus, God has chosen to work His power through us.

### III. God is Able

- A. Here is where our faith must take over.
- B. He is able to make 9/10ths of our money go further than 10/10ths if we will faithfully bring our tithe to His storehouse.
- C. He is able to change totally a life of sin into a beautiful life of righteousness.
  - 1. Peter, a rough fisherman, to the fearless spokesman of God.
  - 2. Paul, the persecutor, to the preacher, church planter and Bible writer.

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### Joseph Parker - "God's Ability" - ([Ephesians 3:20 God's Ability](#))

The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, expresses himself with a redundancy of thankfulness and appreciation which shows the wonderful depth and richness of his nature. He does not mete out his words as if by constraint. He lavishes his heart upon his theme, and, with holy impatience, he urges word upon word, description upon description, that he may give some faint hint at least of the sublimity by which he is dazzled, and of the joy which lifts him almost to heaven. In this chapter we find such expressions as these:—"The unsearchable riches of Christ," "the manifold riches of God," "the riches of his glory," "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Never was language so inadequate to express the thought which inspired his mind, and which threw his heart into ecstasies of inconceivable and unutterable delight. The Christian mediation seemed constantly to enlarge upon the vision of the Apostle. It was never to him a diminishing quantity. Every day he saw in the scheme of the Christian redemption some new point of light—felt in it some new pulse of eternal love. Hence it is a most stimulating and instructive study to follow the intellectual and spiritual development of Paul, to find how he grew in grace and knowledge and wisdom,—yet how at the very last he said, "I count not myself to have attained." Beyond the giddy peak on which he stood there were sublimer heights, and he pressed towards the mark, if haply he might scale those glittering, heavenly steepes. In the text he seemed utterly at a loss to express the fulness of his conception of the grandeur, the riches, the wisdom, the power, and the love of God. We shall miss the force of these words unless we understand the prayer, in connection with which they were uttered.

The Apostle does not give this text as I have given it, namely, as a detached sentence. It is the culmination of a statement; it is something that comes after a serious, anxious effort, which he himself has made; and we must look into the preliminary statement if we would know how Paul was dazzled, overwhelmed, made speechless, by the infinite capacity of God to transcend all mortal prayer and all finite imagination. The Apostle has been uttering a prayer which reads thus:—

"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask]. That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask]. That ye, being rooted and grounded in love [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask], may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the

breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask], that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God [able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask].

Reading the prayer in this manner, using the text as a kind of refrain to each petition, and each petition itself seeming to exhaust the very mercy and love of God, we get some notion of the Apostle's conception of God's infinite wealth, infinite grace, and infinite willingness to give. Understand, then, that in coming to God and availing ourselves of the doctrine of this text, it is incumbent upon us that we should specify what we want from God. A man of flippant speech, of thoughtlessness of mind, may say, "I have asked God for all. Is he able to do exceeding abundantly above that?" Yes, because no man knows what "all" means. The dewdrop has its little all. The Atlantic has its idea of all; and the great star-laden firmament, arching over all things underneath it, has a wider representation still. A man such as I have described may say, "I have asked God for infinite blessings. Is God able to do exceeding abundantly above infinite?" Yes, as you use the word, because you do not know what infinite means. You have only your own little notion about it, and your inch cannot measure the infinitude of God. But apart from that answer, we are to protest against the doctrine that men when they come to God in prayer are to use such words as "all," "everything," "infinitude," without specification of their wants. We must tell God our necessities, interpret to him our hunger and our thirst of soul. We must go to him with particular, well-defined, and urgently-pleaded petitions.

Perhaps this may be difficult of realisation to some minds. I must therefore set it in a lower light. Suppose that a number of petitioners should go to the legislature with a petition worded thus: "We humbly pray your honourable house to do everything for the nation, to take infinite care of it, to let the affairs of the nation tax your attention day and night, and lavish all your resources upon the people." Suppose that a petition like that should be handed into the House of Commons, what would be the fate of it? It would be laughed down, and the only reason, the only good reason, why the petitioners should not be confined to Bedlam would be, lest their insanity should alarm the inmates. That is not a petition. It is void by generality; by referring to all it misses everything. We must specify what we want when we go to the legislature. We must state our case with clearness of definition, and with somewhat of argument. If it be so in our social, political prayers, shall we go to Almighty God with a vagueness which means nothing, with a generality which makes no special demand upon his heart? Read the text in the light of the gospel, and you will see the fulness of its glory, so far as it can be seen by mortal vision. Ask anything of God, and I am prepared to quote these words of the text in reply. What will you ask? Let us in the first instance ask what we all want—whatever may be our condition, age, circumstances. Let us ask for pardon. Is your prayer, God forgive my sins? Now you may apply the Apostle's words: "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask."

You cannot conceive God's notion of pardon. You have an idea of what you mean by forgiveness; but when you have exhausted your own notion of the term forgiveness, you have not shown the Divine intent concerning the soul that is to be forgiven. When God forgives, he does not merely pardon, barely pardon,—he does not by some great straining effort of his love, just come within reach of the suppliant, and lay upon his heart the blessing which is besought. He pardons with pardons! When he casts our sins away, it is not into a shallow pool, it is into the depths of the sea; when he throws it away, it is not on one side, it is behind him. Will you arithmeticians measure the distance which is meant by behind the infinite? When God takes a man's sins away from him, he puts them as far from him as the east is from the west. Can you tell how far the east is from the west? It is an expression that is often upon your lips. Have you ever measured the distance? You cannot; it is an immeasurable line. So, when God comes to pardon us, he pardons with pardons, with pardons again and again, wave upon wave, until we say, "Thou hast done exceeding abundantly above all that we ask." The finite can never grasp the infinite, and our poor mortal capacities cannot hold God's idea of pardon. We have, thank God, some notion of forgiveness; but not until you yourself have entered personally into the mystery of this forgiveness, can you understand or have any hint of the depth of the sea into which God has cast the sins of which we have repented.

What will you ask for now? Ask for sanctification. Is your prayer, Sanctify me, body, soul, and spirit? Then I once more quote the Apostle's text: "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." What is your notion of sanctification? You have thought about it: it is soon exhausted. When you leave reason and get into the region of fancy, your imagination soon wearies, and the description which you give of holiness is after all a negative description. When I read of God's holiness, I read of holiness that is glorious. God is said to be glorious in holiness. Do you understand the emphasis of that redundancy? Holiness would have been a great word to have uttered concerning him, but when you add glorious in holiness—

**Imagination's utmost stretch  
In wonder dies away.**

We know the meaning of innocence; we know what is implied by the terms "not guilty"; we can describe negatively a high condition of character. But God's notion of sanctification! When we have made our notion of sanctification clear and plain he sets his own holiness beside it, and in contrast our purity of development, and our sublimest moral acquisitions become corrupt in the presence of the blazing glory of the divine purity. This is our destiny, if so be we are in Jesus Christ. Holiness is not something we can describe with sufficiency of terms. It is not a quantity we can see in its completeness. We cannot walk round about it and say, This is

the limit thereof. There is always another ray of splendour which we have not seen, and a brighter beam of the ineffable effulgence which has not yet struck upon our vision. So when we ask God to sanctify us, we are to remember that "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

Now, if this be so, it ought to stimulate us in all saintly progress, to inspire us in the study of divine truth, to recover our jaded energies, and tempt, lure, and draw us by the mighty compulsion of inexhaustible reward. This is the peculiar glory of Christian study, that it does not exhaust the student. His weakness becomes his strength. At sunset he is stronger than at sunrise; because Christian study does not tax any one power of the mind unduly. It trains the whole being, the imagination, the fancy, the will, the emotion; lifts up the whole nature equally, with all the equability of complete power,—not by snatches and spasms of strength, but with the sufficiency, breadth, and compass of power which sustains the balance always. This ought to rebuke those of us who imagine that we have finished our Christian education. I believe there are some persons in the world who are under the impression that they have finished God's book. They say they have "read it through." There is a poor sense in which it may be read through; but there is a deeper, truer sense in which we can never get through the Book of God. It is an inexhaustible study,—new every day, like morning light. You have seen splendour before, but until this morning you never saw this light. So it is with this great wonderful Book of God in the study of it God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. The hoariest-headed student who has spent his days in study, and his nights in prayer, will be the first and most emphatic to declare, that the more he has dwelt upon the wonderfulness of God's revelation, the more and more wonderful it has become to all the highest powers of his nature.

Here then is a stimulus, a spur to progress, a call to deeper study. We think we have attained truth. We have not attained all that is meant by the word truth. No man who knows himself and who knows God will say that he has been led into all the chambers of God's great palace of truth. This is the sign of progress; this is the charter of the profoundest humility. The more we know the less we know. We see certain points of light here and there, but the great unexplored regions of truth stretch mile on mile, beyond all our power to traverse the wondrous plain. How is it with us to-day then? Are we fagged men, exhausted students? Do we sit down under the impression that there is nothing more to be known? If we have that idea, let us seek to renew our strength and to recover our inspiration by the word,—"He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." There are attainments we have not made, depths we have not sounded, and heights, oh, heights! We can but look up and wonder, expect, adore. If this be so, we ought to look calmly, with a feeling of chastened triumph, upon all hindrances, difficulties, and obstacles in the way of Christ's kingdom upon the earth. We may look at these in relation to our own puny strength, and quail before them. We are not to depend upon our own resources, but upon God's, in attempting the removal of everything that would intercept the progress of his kingdom in the world. There is a great mountain: I cannot beat it down, all the instruments I can bring to bear upon it seem utterly powerless. But God touches the mountains and they smoke. The Alps, the Apennines, the Pyrenees, and great Himalayas, shall go up like incense before him, and his kingdom shall have a smooth uninterrupted way. There are combinations which I cannot disentangle: conspiracies of the heathen against God and his Son, political conspiracies, social combinations, of which I can make nothing as a poor solitary worker. I can but kneel down before them and pray God to show the greatness of his strength. In a peculiar manner he will touch the reason of such conspirators, and they will become jabbering maniacs in a moment. Sometimes he will touch the speech of such conspirators, and they will not understand what they are saying to one another. Sometimes in passing by, he will touch the earth with his finger: silently it will open and swallow them up.

I say, in my hours of weakness, Yonder is a stone which I cannot remove. If I could get clear of that obstacle all would be right; but the stone is heavy, the stone is sealed, the stone is watched. What can I do? I go up the hill wearily, almost hopelessly, and behold! the stone is rolled away, and on the obstacle there sits the angel of God. "Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!" What then is our Christian hope about the world? Look at ministers, at missionaries, at Sunday-school teachers; look at writers, and at all the efforts made for the progress of divine truth upon the earth. Then, on the other hand, look at all the Paganism that remains unsubdued; at the idol temples which debase and corrupt the world; look at all the institutions that live upon the badness of the human heart! You say, the instrumentality is not equal to the work. You are right. The straw cannot beat the mountain into flying dust. The hand of man cannot crumble the great gigantic bulwarks behind which error has entrenched itself. You are quite right. But God hath chosen the weak things to throw down the mighty. It is not the straw that does it; it is the hand that wields it. Shakespeare dips his pen into the ink and writes "Hamlet." I take up the same pen, dip into the same ink, but I cannot write "Hamlet." It is not the pen that does it; it is the writer. It is not the little instrumentality; it is the God who is able to do, and who has done, exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. It is therefore because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, that we now expect to triumph over the world, and speak of all nations as if they belonged to the Son of God. If the doctrine of the text be true, then it should fill all bad men with terror. We should regard this text as a two-sided text. We are always accustomed to regard it as affording comfort to the Christian heart, strength to the toiling pilgrim who moves heavenward day by day. The text does supply all that is needful for the encouragement and strength of such. But it has a tremendous back-stroke. The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword—mighty for the gaining of victories, but terrible to those who feel its cutting power.

You have a certain notion of hell. We cannot tell what is meant by that awful word. We speak of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. But what do we know about the words which involve so much? We cannot tell what is meant by everlasting

punishment. Modify the doctrine of hell as you will,—dilute the term "everlasting punishment" as you like,—avail yourselves of all the resources of etymology to the furthest possible extent, that you may reduce the limit and application of certain words;—when you have done all, it must remain a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! There are moments that are eternities. It is the nature of all pain to have itself described as an everlasting punishment. Inflict some wound upon yourself now, and the next hour will feel as if it were a day: you feel as if it would never, never pass away. It is of the nature of punishment to force itself upon the sufferer as everlasting penalty. Joy hath wings. Joy filling the hour, the hour flies away, and we say, It cannot be gone already! Yes, already! Yes. It is there we read the meaning of the words "eternal life." Do not let us imagine that because we may have this notion, or that peculiar or heterodox exception, about the punishment that awaits the sinner, that therefore we have diluted the notion to nothing. When we have done our utmost in that direction, God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we think. The oppressor says, "Well, if it has come to this I am prepared to bear it." No, you are not prepared to bear it! When I say it is this, I use human words in a human sense; but when God says it is this, I cannot tell all his meaning. When the poor man who has twelve shillings a week says that a certain person is rich, that is one meaning of the word rich. When the man who has ten thousand pounds a year speaks of the same individual, perhaps he might say he is poor. So words have different meanings as used by different persons. Every man must be his own dictionary. You must look at the speaker before you can understand some speeches. You must look at the etymologist before you can understand the etymology. So when God says he will utterly destroy the wicked, remember that it is God who says so, and do not measure the word by your poor lexicography.

It may be difficult for some minds to follow the argument out spiritually; we must therefore descend to illustration. Here is a very clever artist, who has made a beautiful thing he brings before us, and we gather round it and say, "It is most exquisitely done. What is this, sir?" "That," replies the artist, "is my notion of a flower, and I am going to call that flower a rose." "Well, it is a beautiful thing, —very graceful, and altogether beautifully executed: you are very clever." So he is, and now that exhausts his notion of the rose. But let God just hand in a full-blown rose from the commonest garden in the world, and where is your waxen beauty? Underneath every leaf is written, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Let him just send the sweet spring morning in upon us, with the first violet, and all your artificial florists, if they have one spark of wit left, will pick up their goods and go off as soon as possible. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." The meanest insect that flutters in the warm sunlight is a grander thing than the finest marble statue ever chiselled by the proudest sculptor.

Now we are going to have a very festive day. We are going to pluck flowers and fashion them into arches, and we shall make our arches very high, very beautiful,—and, so far as the flowers go, they are most gorgeously and exquisitely beautiful. We have put up the wires; we have festooned these wires, and we say, "Now, is not that very beautifully done?" and of course, we who always drink the toast, "Our noble selves," say, Yes. But God has only to take a few rain-drops and strike through them the sunlight, and where are your paste-board arches and your skilful working! "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." Fellow-students in this holy mystery, believe me, as in nature, so in the higher kingdom of grace. As in matter he surpasses all your sculptors, and is in all schools infinitely superior to men, so in the revelation of truth to the heart, in the way of redeeming man from sin, in the way of sanctifying fallen corrupt human nature,—all your theorists and speculators, all your plaster dealers and social reformers, and philanthropic regenerators, must get out of the way as artificial florists when God comes to us with the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valley.

Then, let us leave all inferior teachers and go straight to the Master himself. We have to deal with sin, and the only answer to sin, which answer is comprehended in one word, is the Cross. God's foolishness is better than our wisdom. God's weakness is infinitely superior to our strength. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." If you choose to make your own cisterns, broken cisterns, to hold no water, you may do so. Let others of us say, As for us and our house, we will go—poor, guilty, heart-thirsty sinners as we are—to the fountain of living waters, and if we perish, we will pray and perish only there! No dead man was ever found at that fountain. No dead man was ever found with his hand on the Cross,—with his lips at the well of life.

**Ephesians 3:21 to Him be the [glory](#) in the [church](#) and in [Christ Jesus](#) to [all generations forever](#) and [ever](#). [Amen](#) (NASB: [Lockman](#))**

**Greek:** [auto e doxa en te ekklesia kai en Christo lesou eis pasas tas geneas tou aionos ton aionon: amen.](#)

**BGT** α τ δ ξ α ν τ κ κ λ η σ κ α ν Χ ρ ι σ τ η σ ο ε ς π σ α ς τ ς γ ε ν ε ς τ ο α ν ο ς τ ν α ν ω ν , μ ν .

**Amplified:** To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen (so be it). ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen. ([Westminster Press](#))

**ESV** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

**KJV** Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

**NIV** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

**NET**: to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. ([NET Bible](#))

**NLT**: Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. (NLT - Tyndale House)

**NLT (revised)** Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

**Phillips**: to him be glory in the Church through Jesus Christ for ever and ever, amen! (Phillips: Touchstone)

**Wuest**: to Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus into all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#))

**Young's Literal**: to Him is the glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus, to all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen.

#### TO HIM BE THE GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS: *auto e doxa en te ekklesia kai en Christo iesou*:

- **To Him be the glory** Ep 1:6; 1Chr 29:11; Ps 29:1,2; 72:19; 115:1; Is 6:3; 42:12; Mt 6:13; Luke 2:14; Ro 11:36; 16:27; Gal 1:5; Php 2:11; 4:20; 2Ti 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1Pe 5:11; Rev 4:9, 10, 11; 5:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14; 7:12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
- **In Christ Jesus** Php 1:11; Heb 13:15,16; 1Pe 2:5
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:18-21 The Fullness of God, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 The Christian Turn-on](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 Experiencing the Power of Christ](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:20-21 God is Able!](#) - Steven Cole

### SOLI DEO GLORIA

**To Him be the glory** ([doxa](#)) **in the church** ([ekklesia](#)) **and in Christ Jesus** - **To Him** is obviously God the Father. The church is composed of sinners saved by His grace which in turn lead to the praise of the glory of His grace. One is reminded of Lou Fellingham's great hymn "**To God be the glory**." ([listen to this incredible vocal version](#)).

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord  
Let the earth hear His voice  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord  
Let the people rejoice

**Steven Cole** - As **F. F. Bruce** puts it (*The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*[Eerdmans], p. 331), "God is to be glorified in the church because the church, comprising Jews and Gentiles, is His masterpiece of grace." But, since the church is the body of Christ, the head, God's glory in the church "cannot be divorced from his glory 'in Christ Jesus'" (*ibid.*). And, this glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus will continue not only in time, but throughout eternity, as He continues to "show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ep 2:7). ([God is Able!](#))

**Ruth Paxson** writes...How fitting that the petitions of this prayer should glide into praise, and that not only this prayer but these chapters should close with a doxology! "**Unto him**" -- the Master Workman who has wrought in the Church through the presence of His beloved Son in the power of His mighty Spirit to make it the manifestation of His glory, both now and throughout all the ages -- be praise! (The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian)

**Blaikie** - To God the whole credit of the scheme of grace and the work of grace as carried out in his people is due ("Not of works, lest any man should boast"); therefore let the Church acknowledge this, and cordially and openly ascribe to God his due. Let this feeling be universally encouraged and cherished in the Church, and let it find in the Church services suitable occasions of breaking forth in song and prayer. Again the apostle's favorite formula comes in "in Christ Jesus," to denote that this act of adoration is to be done in immediate connection with the work and person of Christ; for it is he who has brought about the whole condition of things



from which the act of adoration springs. And this ascription of praise is not transitory; this view of the Divine character and actings will never become obsolete or be superseded by other views; it will claim their cordial ascriptions forever—literally, *to all the generations of the age of the ages*. ([Pulpit Commentary](#))

**Maclaren on be the glory** - 'The glory of God' is the lustre of His own perfect character, the bright sum total of all the blended brilliances that compose His name. When that light is welcomed and adored by men, they are said to 'give glory to God,' and this doxology is at once a prophecy that the working of God's power on His redeemed children will issue in setting forth the radiance of His Name yet more, and a prayer that it may. So we have here the great thought expressed in many places of Scripture, that the highest exhibition of the divine character for the reverence and love-of the whole universe, shall we say?-lies in His work on Christian souls, and the effect produced thereby on them. God takes His stand, so to speak, on this great fact in His dealings, and will have His creatures estimate Him by it. He reckons it His highest praise that He has redeemed men, and by His dwelling in them fills them with His own fulness. And this chiefest praise and brightest glory accrues to Him 'in the Church in Christ Jesus.' ([Sermon](#))

**Eadie** - The place of doxology is the **church**, and the glory is hymned by its members, but the spirit of the song is inspired by oneness with Jesus. **Glory** (doxa) is the splendour of moral excellence, and in what place should such glory be ascribed but in the church, which has witnessed so much of it, and whose origination, life, blessings, and hopes are so many samples and outbursts of it? And how should it be presented? Not apart from Christ, or simply for His sake, but in Him—in thrilling fellowship with Him; for no other consciousness can inspire us with the sacred impulse, and praise of no other origin and character can be accepted by that God who is Himself in Christ. ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

**Expositor's** adds that "The close juxtaposition of the **church** and **Christ** is arresting. For Paul, body and members form a single entity. Textual variants reflect the daring nature of the original order, which refers to the church first. As Thompson puts it, "The honour of Jesus is in the hands of the Church" (p. 60). In the final formula, two common liturgical expressions are combined (cf. Dan 7:18) to produce a stronger phrase than usual to describe eternity. Once again, the fact that the church is included here is remarkable. In Christ, however, the Bride will live forever (1Th 4:17; Rev 22:17). To which the response of all God's people must be "Yes indeed, Lord" (Amen). ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Vincent** comments on "**in the church**" writing that "Through which His many-tinted wisdom is to be displayed, and which is His fullness."

Here is a large prayer to pray...

Pray that God will be glorified in His church and in Christ Jesus,  
to all generations forever and ever. Amen!

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**Glory** ([1391](#)) (**doxa** from **dokeo** = to think or recognize) means to give a proper opinion. This is the glory due God and is to be given Him in the church. The apostle has repeatedly insisted that the end of redemption is the glory of God (Eph 1:6, 12, 14, 18; 2:7; 3:10, 16). The basic idea in the word **doxa** is that of manifestation. In the Old Testament doxa was primarily the brightness or radiance of God's presence. **Glory** speaks of a manifestation of God's true nature, presence, or likeness. To give God glory is not to add something to him; rather, it is an active acknowledgement or extolling of Who He is or what He has already done (Ps. 29:2; 96:8). He is glorified when He is allowed to be seen as He really is. To be where God is will be glory. To be what God intended will be glory. To do what God purposed will be glory. The basic idea in the word doxa is that of manifestation. The glory of God is the manifestation of His Being, His character and His acts. The glory of God is what He is essentially. Glory, therefore, is the true apprehension of God or things. The glory of God must mean His unchanging essence.

**Church** ([1577](#)) (**ekklesia** from **ekkaléo** = call out in turn from **ek** = out + **kaleo** = call) literally "called-out ones". The Greeks used **ekklesia** for assembly of citizens called out to transact city business. The church is a living organism, composed of living members joined together; through which Christ works, carries out His purposes and He lives. **Henry Morris** adds "The "church," consisting of all born-again believers in Christ, will be an eternal entity, even though also composed of many unique individuals. See Hebrews 12:23, where it is called "the general assembly and church of the firstborn"; it is also called "the glorious church," which is the bride of Christ" (Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 21:9)."

**In Christ Jesus** - **In** indicates this as a **locative of sphere** ([note](#)). To help you understand the sense of this locative of sphere here is an illustration and explanation of another use in Jude 1:20+ "**praying in the Holy Spirit**":

**Kenneth Wuest** explains that **in the Holy Spirit** "is **locative of sphere**. That is, all true prayer is exercised in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, motivated and empowered by Him. That means that if the saint expects to really pray, he must be Spirit-filled or Spirit-controlled (Eph 5:18-[note](#)). The fullness of the Holy Spirit is the prerequisite to effectual praying. The Spirit, when yielded to, leads us in our petitions and generates within us the faith necessary to acceptable and answered prayer. The expression "praying in the Holy Spirit" is also

instrumental of means. We pray by means of the Holy Spirit, in dependence upon Him." ([Word Studies - Eerdman Publishing](#))

**TO ALL GENERATIONS FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN: eis pasas tas geneas tou aionos ton aionon; amen:**

- **To all generations forever and ever. Amen.** Eph 2:7; 1Pe 5:11; 2Pe 3:18; Jude 1:25
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:18-21 The Fullness of God, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 The Christian Turn-on](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 Experiencing the Power of Christ](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:20-21 God is Able!](#) - Steven Cole

#### **Related Passages:**

Ephesians 2:7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 5:11 To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Jude 1:25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

### **PRAISE TO GOD ETERNALLY**

**To all generations forever and ever. Amen** - More literally this reads "unto all the generations of the age of the ages".

**O'Brien** has an excellent summary statement writing that "The doxology at the end of Paul's prayer concludes the first half of the letter on the same note with which it began in the introductory eulogy (Eph 1:3–14), namely, in praise of God for his mighty salvation, initiated in eternity, carried into effect in Christ, and intended to redound to the praise of Gods glorious grace for all eternity. Paul wants his readers to have a theological perspective on Gods mighty saving purposes. He prays that they might be empowered by Christ through his Spirit, so that they might walk in love just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us (Eph 5:2). The prayer and doxology of chapter 3 function in an important preparatory way for the subsequent admonitions to love in the second half of the letter. ([The Letter to the Ephesians. W. B. Eerdmans. 1999](#))

**Maclaren** - As in the former clauses the idea of the transcendent greatness of the power of God was expressed by accumulated synonyms, so here the kindred thought of its eternity, and consequently of the ceaseless duration of the resulting glory, is sought to be set forth by a similar aggregation. The language creaks and labours, as it were, under the weight of the great conception. Literally rendered, the words are-'to all generations of the age of the ages'-a remarkable fusing together of two expressions for unbounded duration, which are scarcely congruous. We can understand 'to all generations' as expressive of duration as long as birth and death shall last. We can understand 'the age of the ages' as pointing to that endless epoch whose moments are 'ages'; but the blending of the two is but an unconscious acknowledgment that the speech of earth, saturated, as it is, with the colouring of time, breaks down in the attempt to express the thought of eternity. Undoubtedly that solemn conception is the one intended by this strange phrase. The work is to go on for ever and ever, and with it the praise. As the ages which are the beats of the pendulum of eternity come and go, more and more of God's power will flow out to us, and more and more of God's glory will be manifested in us. It must be so; for God's gift is infinite, and man's capacity of reception is indefinitely capable of increase. Therefore eternity will be needful in order that redeemed souls may absorb all of God which He can give or they can take. The process has no limits, for there is no bound to be set to the possible approaches of the human spirit to the divine, and none to the exuberant abundance of the beauty and glory which God will give to His child. Therefore we shall live for ever: and for ever show forth His praise and blaze out like the sun with the irradiation of His glory. We cannot die till we have exhausted God. Till we comprehend all His nature in our thoughts, and reflect all His beauty in our character; till we have attained all the bliss that we can think, and received all the good that we can ask; till Hope has nothing before her to reach towards, and God is left behind: we 'shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' ([Sermon](#))

**Eadie** explains Paul's descriptions of time writing that "This remarkable accumulation of terms is an intensive formula denoting eternity...This language, borrowed from the changes and succession of time, is employed to picture out eternity. It is a period of

successive generations filling up the age, which again is an age of ages—or made up of a series of ages—a period composed of many periods; and through the cycles of such a period of periods, glory is to be ascribed to God...The entire phrase is a temporal image of eternity. The obligation to glorify God lasts through eternity, and the glorified church will ever delight in rendering praise, “as is most due.” Eternal perfection will sustain an eternal anthem. The Trinity is here again brought out to view. The power within us is that of the Spirit, and glory in Christ is presented to the Father who answers prayer through the Son, and by the Spirit; and, therefore, to the Father, in the Son, and by the Spirit, is offered this glorious minstrelsy—“as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

“To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
The God whom heaven’s triumphant host  
And saints on earth adore,  
Be glory as in ages past,  
As now it is, and so shall last  
When time shall be no more.”

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**Generations** (1074) (**genea** from **ginomai** = to become) primarily signifies a birth or a descent. Hence genea refers to that which has been begotten, such as a family or successive members of a genealogy. Genea refers to the whole multitude of people living at the same time and belonging to the same reproductive age-class. In other words genea refers to a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously. It refers to all of the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively. Although, not everyone agrees, **generations** suggests the times of human history on this present earth which are yet to come to pass, but when this earthly drama is played out at the end of the Millennium, this anthem of praise to our Father will continue into eternity, time without end. Amen!

**Forever...ever** (165) (**aion**) is literally of the age of the ages. There is evidently more than one age to come, a succession of ages. The **church** consisting of all born-again believers in Christ, will be an eternal entity, offering up endless praise age after age.

Paul is saying in essence that because of all that God has done for us, we ought to spend every moment giving Him His due; disciplining our minds to this practice so that even unconsciously we are glorifying Him.

**Amen** (281) (**amen** from Hebrew verb **aman** = be firm, steady, trustworthy) means firm, trustworthy, true and suggests solidity and firmness. Amen was used as a strengthening and confirming statement (why are there so few “Amens” in the modern church? Is the message being proclaimed not true, solid and trustworthy? Or are those in the pews so enamored and entangled with the world that they are asleep to the great truths of the Bible?). **Amen** acknowledges that which is valid and binding. Amen serves as a word of affirmation.

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Steven Cole's sermon on Eph 3:20, 21

### God is Able!

A woman once approached the famous preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, after he spoke and asked, “Do you think we should pray for even the little things in our lives, or just for the big things?” In his dignified British manner he replied, “Madam, can you think of anything in your life that is big to God?” The apostle Paul would have said, “Amen!” He has just prayed that the Ephesians would be filled up to all the fullness of God. It’s a prayer that they would come to total spiritual perfection! You can’t go any higher than to be filled with all the fullness of God! Paul adds this doxology to say, “In case you think that it is too much to ask God to fill His saints to all of His fullness, remember that He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to His power and for His glory.”

God is not just able to do beyond what we ask, but abundantly beyond. But that’s not enough, He is able to do far more abundantly beyond what we ask. But, we still aren’t to the limit: “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” Now, what is it that you need? I want to encourage you to pray in faith, asking God to do far beyond all that we can ask or think.

Yet at the same time, I want to be realistic in applying this text. There are certain mysteries about the interaction between our prayers and the sovereign will of God that I cannot explain. When John the Baptist was imprisoned, I am sure that his disciples were praying for his release. It would have brought glory to God if John had been released to preach for many more years. Yet, John lost his head. Although God easily could have freed John (as He later freed Peter), it was not His will to do so.

When Jesus predicted Peter's denials, I would have thought that it would be right to pray that Peter not sin at all. But, Jesus didn't pray that. Rather, He prayed that after Peter had sinned and was restored, that he would strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:31,32). God's sovereign will permitted Peter's sin in order to strengthen Peter and others in the long run.

Even the apostle Paul, who penned these great words, had many disappointments in his ministry. Demas was one of Paul's fellow workers, and yet he deserted Paul because he loved the world (cf. Philemon 1:24, 2Ti 4:10). Surely, Paul prayed for Demas to repent, but there is no biblical record that he ever did so. Paul prayed for the conversion of the Jews (Ro 9:1, 2, 3, 4, 5), and yet they largely rejected the gospel. In church history, Adoniram Judson was a great man of faith, who gave his life to reaching the people of Burma. And yet, he labored for years before his first convert, and even when he died, there was not much visible fruit.

Over the past 31 years of my ministry, I am painfully aware of many situations where God has not answered my prayers for Him to do for His glory far more than I could ask or think. There have been lost people for whom I have prayed that they would be saved, but they were not saved. There have been broken Christian marriages that I have prayed would be restored, but they ended in divorce. There have been sinning Christians for whom I have prayed that they would repent, but there has been no repentance.

And so I want to motivate you to pray big prayers with faith in a mighty God, who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. And, yet at the same time, I don't want to gloss over the difficult struggles that you will surely encounter in your prayer life. We simply cannot know the big picture of what God is doing, and so invariably we will experience disappointments in prayer.

Keep in mind that in the context, Paul's prayer for God to do abundantly beyond what we ask or think is not a prayer for physical miracles, but rather for Christ to dwell in the hearts of believers so that we may comprehend His great love for us, so that we will grow to complete spiritual maturity. In that context, Paul is saying:

Because God is able to do far more abundantly  
beyond all that we ask or think,  
we should pray for that which would further  
His glory through Christ and His church.

There are two themes in Paul's doxology:

**1. God is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us (Ep 3:20).**

Under this heading, note two things:

**A. God is able to do far more abundantly beyond what we ask or think because He is omnipotent.**

From Genesis to Revelation, we see God's mighty power at work. We can summarize it under four headings:

**(1) God's power is seen in creation.**

God spoke the entire universe into existence out of nothing by His word alone! In Romans 1:20, Paul writes, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." The psalmist exclaimed (Ps. 33:6, 9), "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.... For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Or, as Jeremiah (32:17) exclaimed, "Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You." Every day all around us, we have evidence to remind us of God's omnipotence.

Whether we look at the vastness of the universe, with billions of galaxies containing billions of stars, or at the complexity of our own bodies, or at the incredible design on the microscopic level, we see evidence of a powerful Creator. Have you ever swatted a little gnat that was flying in front of your face? Have you ever stopped to think about how difficult it would be to design a creature that small that can not only fly, but also eat and reproduce? Or, as Michael Behe explains (Darwin's Black Box [Touchstone/ Simon & Schuster], pp. 51-73), microscopic proteins and bacteria have intricately designed, irreducibly complex structures that must be all there for them to work. They could not have evolved gradually. All creation shouts, "God is a powerful Creator!"

## **(2) God's power is seen in His judgments.**

Throughout the Bible there are examples of God unleashing a small amount of His power to bring judgment on rebellious sinners. He brought the worldwide flood in Noah's day. He confused the languages of the proud men at the tower of Babel. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone. He unleashed the ten plagues on Egypt and then destroyed the Egyptian army in the sea. On numerous occasions, God destroyed thousands of people in a short time, through plagues or warfare or natural disasters (Nu 16:25-35, 46, 47, 48, 49; 25:9; Judges 7:22; 2Ki 19:35; 2Chr 20:22, 23; Ps. 18:12, 13, 14, 15).

## **(3) God's power is seen in His converting sinners.**

The apostle Paul is exhibit A, of course. He was persecuting the church with vengeance, when God stopped him in his tracks and changed him into the man who would preach to the Gentiles, whom he formerly detested. In our text, Paul refers to "the power that works within us." That takes us back to Ephesians 1:19, where Paul said that the same power that raised Christ from the dead (the greatest display of power in human history) is what raised us from spiritual death to life. In Ephesians 3:7, Paul refers to the working of God's power that converted him and made him a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles. In 3:16, he referred to God's power through His Spirit that strengthens us in the inner man.

When the rich young ruler walked away from salvation, Jesus told the disciples that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved. When they exclaimed, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus answered (Matt. 19:26), "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." We need to remember that the conversion of a soul is not a display of human willpower, but rather a display of God's mighty power in raising the spiritually dead to new life.

## **(4) God's power is seen in His working when we are unable to do anything.**

The whole point of prayer is to ask God to do what we cannot do in our own strength or ability. If we think (erroneously) that we can pull it off ourselves, then we don't need to pray. God often puts His people in impossible situations to display His power and glory. There are far more examples of this in the Bible than I can list, but here are a few.

Abraham and Sarah were physically beyond the ability to conceive children. Even when they were younger, Sarah had been unable to conceive. When Sarah laughed at the idea that she would conceive, the Lord confronted her with the rhetorical question (Ge 18:14), "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" In response to God's promise, she did conceive Isaac. Later, when God asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham obeyed because (Heb 11:19), "He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead...."

### **Nothing is impossible for the Lord!**

God directed Moses and the Israelites to leave Egypt by a route where they had the Red Sea in front of them and the pursuing Egyptian army behind them. They had no human means of escape. In that impossible situation, Moses told the panicked people (Ex 14:13), "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today...." The Lord miraculously opened the sea so that the Israelites could pass through, but He closed the sea over the Egyptian army. Nothing is impossible with God!

Elisha was surrounded by the army of the king of Aram, with horses and chariots that had come to take him captive. When his panicked servant told him that they were surrounded by this hostile army, Elisha calmly answered (2Ki 6:16), "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Then he prayed (2Ki 6:17), "'O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

### **Nothing is impossible with God!**

Later, when the same king had surrounded Samaria, the famine was so bad that women were eating their own children in order to survive. Elisha predicted that the very next day the famine would be completely lifted. The royal officer of the king of Israel retorted (2Ki 7:2), "Behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" Elisha responded by predicting that official's death, but affirmed that the famine would end, according to the word of the Lord. The following day the Lord caused the invading army to hear the sound of chariots and horses, so that they panicked and fled, leaving all of their supplies behind. In their haste to plunder the camp of the Aramean army, the people of Samaria trampled to death the king's official, exactly as Elisha had predicted. Nothing is impossible with God!

I could cite many more examples, but here is one from the New Testament. Herod had imprisoned the apostle Peter, and was planning to execute him the next day. Peter was chained to two guards, inside a locked cell, with more guards outside, inside a prison with a locked iron outer door. In response to the church's not-very-believing prayers for Peter's release, the Lord sent an angel who caused Peter's chains to fall off. He led Peter through

opened iron doors, past all the guards, and out into the streets as a free man. Again, we see, nothing is impossible with God!

I should point out, however, that prior to Peter's escape, Herod executed James, the brother of John. Was the church praying for James' release? We are not told, but I cannot imagine that they did not pray. Although God easily could have delivered James, He allowed him to die, while rescuing Peter. We need to remember the words of Hebrews 11:33, 34, 35a, which tell of great heroes of faith, "who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched

the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection." We all say, "Amen, preach it brother!" We like stories like that!

But, keep reading (He 11:35, 36, 37, 38, 39), "and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised." They believed God, but He did not deliver them from their trials.

And so while God often displays His mighty power by working when we are incapable of doing anything in our own strength, at times for reasons we do not usually understand, He chooses not to display His power in such ways. At those times, His power is displayed through the patient, joyous endurance of His people in the midst of their suffering (Col. 1:11, 12; 2Cor 12:7, 8, 9, 10). But even when God chooses not to deliver us, it is not because He is lacking in power. He is able to do far beyond what we ask or think because

He is omnipotent.

## **B. God is willing to do far beyond what we ask or think because He is good.**

Satan tempted Eve by getting her to doubt that God and His commandments are good. When we are facing impossible trials, we must be on guard against the same temptation. It is easy to begin to doubt that God really cares about us. But, Paul reminds us (Ro 8:31, 32), "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" If He did the greatest thing in giving His own Son, He will now do the relatively smaller things, according to His good and perfect will.

In the same vein, Peter writes to those who were suffering terrible persecution at the hands of the wicked Nero, telling them (and us) to cast all of our cares on the Lord, because He cares for us. Then he warns about the devil's prowling around like a lion to devour us, and adds (1Pe 5:8, 9, 10), "But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." So, even in the worst of trials, we should remember that God in His goodness is willing to do far beyond what we ask or even think. There is far more here, but I must move on! Note, also,

## **2. We should ask for that which would further God's glory through Christ and His church (Ep 3:21).**

Note two things:

### **A. God's glory is the end for which He created the world.**

Jonathan Edwards wrote a brilliant (and not easy to follow!) essay on this subject. John Piper is the best modern author to help us understand this point (see, *God's Passion for His Glory* [Crossway], which contains the complete text of Edward's essay). Edwards argued that God would be unrighteous if He did not delight fully in what is most beautiful and worthy of delight, namely, in Himself and His glory. While it would be utterly



sinful for us to delight in our own glory, because we are imperfect and sinful creatures, it is utterly right for God, because He alone is the absolutely perfect, eternal Creator.

Also, God's glory is the goal of redemption, as Paul has made clear (Ep 1:6, 12, 14, 18; 2:7; 3:10, 16). As God saves people who were formerly dead in their sins, (Ep 2:1, 2, 3), seats them with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6), and builds them into His holy temple (Ep 2:21), He is glorified. As Peter O'Brien notes (The Letter to the Ephesians [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 269), "The doxology at the end of Paul's prayer concludes the first half of the letter on the same note with which it began in the introductory eulogy (Ep 1:3-14), namely, in praise of God for his mighty salvation, initiated in eternity, carried into effect in Christ, and intended to redound to the praise of God's glorious grace for all eternity. Paul wants his readers to have a theological perspective on God's mighty saving purposes."

## **B. God's glory is displayed in His church when we live in harmony and obedience and ask Him to work through us for His purpose and glory.**

Paul puts the church first, because he has been showing how the church is God's new creation, brought into existence by the cross that broke down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. As F. F. Bruce puts it (The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians [Eerdmans], p. 331), "God is to be glorified in the church because the church, comprising Jews and Gentiles, is His masterpiece of grace." But, since the church is the body of Christ, the head, God's glory in the church "cannot be divorced from his glory 'in Christ Jesus'" (ibid.). And, this glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus will continue not only in time, but throughout eternity, as He continues to "show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ep 2:7).

In the context, Paul is laying the doctrinal foundation for the appeal to love and unity and holiness, which follows (Ep 4:1-5:21). So the application of this mind-stretching truth is that God is only glorified in the church in the present age when we live in harmony (Ep 2:15, 16, 19, 20, 21) and holiness, and when we depend on Him in prayer for that which would glorify Him. When the church divides over petty issues, or when church leaders or other Christians fall into sin, it brings dishonor to our glorious God. So we must be on guard and we must pray for God's glory to be displayed through us, as He transforms us for His glory.

## **Conclusion**

Here are four ways to apply these wonderful verses:

**First**, don't be guilty of not having because you haven't asked. God says (Ps. 81:10), "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide and I will fill it." So, open wide! Ask!

**Second**, don't be guilty of not having because you doubt God's ability or His willingness to give. Nothing is impossible with God! As the loving Father, He will give good gifts to His children who ask (Matt. 7:11).

We can't always understand His purposes, but we never should doubt His ability or His goodness towards us.

**Third**, don't be guilty of praying small prayers. Pray "big" prayers! It is impossible to ask God for too much, assuming that it is in line with His will and for His glory. Phillips Brooks said, "Pray the largest prayers. You cannot think a prayer so large that God, in answering

it, will not wish you had made it larger. Pray not for crutches but for wings."

**Fourth**, pray for yourself and for this church that for His glory, God would do through us that which is humanly inexplicable. Don't try to scrounge up 200 denarii to barely meet the needs of the hungry multitude.

- Pray for the Lord to multiply our few loaves and fishes, so that He would get all the glory.
- Pray for the powerful conversion of many sinners.
- Pray for repentance and holiness for His saints.
- Pray that He will be glorified in His church and in Christ Jesus, to all generations forever and ever. Amen!

## **Application Questions**

1. How can we pray in faith (Mark 11:22, 23, 24) when we can't know God's sovereign will for certain in advance?

2. How can we sort out whether our prayers are selfish or for God's glory or some mixture of both?
3. Put yourself in the place of the apostle John. Your brother is executed, while Peter is miraculously freed. How would you feel? How would you process your confusion over this?
4. Some claim that if we have faith in God, He must answer our prayers. Why is this wrong? (See Heb 11:33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39.)