

Ephesians 3:20-21

Today's lesson deals with the motivation, or conviction, behind Paul's actions and instructions in the previous several verses. The flow of this passage matters greatly as Paul has exhorted the believers to boldness and confidence and then prayed for God to move in them and through them. These two factors: man's responsibility and God's Sovereign work through man's efforts, are pillars of any Christian work. What we will see today is that prayers for ourselves and our fellow believers are not frivolous, if anything they are too diminished! Nevertheless, they are offered up with confidence that God can do far more through us than we can imagine.

1. God is able

- a. Verse 20 is one of my favorite verses in all the Bible
- b. I love the grandiose statement that illuminates the nature of our God
- c. I think that God's vastness is summarized nicely by Paul's words... notice the sum total of what he says here
 - i. Not only does Paul say that God can do more than we ask, Paul says that God can do more than we "think"
 1. This is a bit of conjecture here but I do believe part of the reason why this little word is inserted is because of our propensity to only ask for that which we believe is doable
 2. There are times in my prayer life when I pray for that which might be unattainable by me but is still "reasonable"
 - a. Stated differently, there are things I know God can do and other things that, if I'm not careful, I write off as impossible
- d. Paul's point here is that this is simply not true!
 - i. We pray because we believe that our God is so gloriously powerful that He can do things we can't even imagine
 - ii. This is why Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus
 - iii. He prayed because he trusted that God would do miraculous things through them
- e. Catch this (very important), Paul's conviction that the church would prosper and be fruitful was not grounded in his confidence in the mere mortals that comprised the fellowship in Ephesus. His prayer was based on the conviction that God was going to use these imperfect and frail instruments for great things
 - i. Why would Paul think this? Well... because God promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18)
 - ii. Christ promised power to His disciples (Acts 1:8)

- f. Our prayers for others are not capped by our conception of their limitations... our prayers for individuals and the progression of the church is governed by our conception of God
 - g. Do you pray for the church (and individual believers who make it up) today? If not, your pessimism may actually say more about your concept of God than your concept of your peers
 - h. God is able to do miraculous things dear brother or sister
 - i. Through the proclamation of His Gospel He can:
 1. Bring the dead to life
 2. Bring reconciliation to the feuding
 3. Heal the sick
 4. Use the simple and the foolish and the weak
 5. Restore families
 6. Change entire communities (He did that very thing in Ephesus!)
 - i. He can do more than we can ask or think, so think of the most grandiose things that are in accordance with His will and ask
2. God works through His people
- a. Notice here that Paul says God works “according to the power at work within us...”
 - b. What does this mean? It seems to me that the best understanding of this phrase is that Paul is speaking of the power of God, in His Spirit, to use His vessels for His glory
 - c. If so, then Paul is teaching us something very basic and very important here...
 - i. God is going to use people to accomplish His goal and these people are going to be fruitful because of His power
 - ii. We are not to measure men by their natural abilities or faults, we are to measure men by the presence of the Spirit (or lack thereof)
 - iii. God can do more through a man or woman of God who loves Him and, therefore, is yielded to Him than we could ever imagine
 - d. Our job is not to grow in our own strength, our job is to grow in relationship with Him and trust that He will use us however He sees fit
 - e. There is an implication here... whereas God supplies the power, we are accountable for the faithfulness
 - i. God promises to move in and through His people but He commands us to be faithful in the process
 - ii. Some of us have rarely experienced the power of God because we are not typically obedient to the command of God
 - iii. It is incumbent upon us to trust that God will move us and to honor God as our Sovereign
 - iv. What He does through us is His business but our obedience to Him is our responsibility