

THE FORCE OF HOLINESS

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul prays in several places that the members of the church be given power, but it is not just power to be used haphazardly. It is not discretionary power that he prays for, rather it is undeniable power. It is a force that overcomes us and changes us on the inside, in spite of any resistance. A supernatural force that will do in us what we can never do for ourselves.

Ephesians 3:14-19 says, ***“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”***

To understand this passage, let me remind you of what Paul has been saying to the Ephesians up to this point. He begins the letter by exploring the big picture – that God has redeemed some out the fallen mass of humanity in order reveal the glory of His grace and to bring all things together under one Head, Jesus Christ. Then Paul demonstrates how this is being done; by salvation, by grace alone, and through faith. This is the only way that anyone is brought into a redeemed relationship with the Creator – both Jew and Gentile. Therefore, God is drawing both groups together in order to form one new people of God. In fact, Paul says, I was called to be an apostle for this very purpose, to gather the Gentiles into the body of Christ, into the covenant community of God.

It is because Paul was given the specific task to bring in the Gentiles (all the other nations and peoples who were not Jewish), that he now kneels before the Father and prays that they will have **power**. But power to do what?

First and foremost, to believe. He prays that they may latch on to the message of the Gospel, not just initially but continually – probing its depths, its contours, its textures. He prays that they may become so familiar with love of Christ that they can rattle off its dimensions the same way we rattle off the square footage of our houses. Do you know Christ's love that well? Paul also prays that we will know the love of Christ even beyond its dimensions. He knows that even as we explore the depths of Christ's love, we will never get its full measure – it is far beyond us. So he prays that we will know even that which exceeds our ability to know. That is quite a prayer, one that is seemingly impossible. But let us not forget who is at work here; the God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we think or imagine.

Now, why pray for something that seems like an impossibility anyway? God loves us, we love God, isn't the natural progression of things that we will grow to love Him more? After all, didn't He die for us? That is a pretty powerful motivator for us to love him. Yes, it is! But always remember, it was by the **power** of God – by the work of the Holy Spirit that we came to believe the message of the gospel in the first place. Without God's gracious intervention in our lives. Without Him enabling us to believe the message, we still would not believe.

You see, the **force of holiness** is God's power at work in us. It is not some divine battery pack that we recharge and discharge at our discretion. It is not that we become powerful in the Spirit, rather it is God's Spirit that is powerful in us.

The **force of holiness** is God Himself in action. The same power that flung the stars into space and formed the earth, that called everything into existence, is at work in you and me. Yes, it is at work in every believer. And since it is the power of God at work in us, these two things are true. First, this power is not at our disposal for our own purposes. It must fulfil the purposes of God. For those who preach that God's power is yours to use, to empower you to become wealthy and successful or to make your life storm free do not understand the nature of God's power and thus pervert the message of the gospel. The **force of holiness** must fulfil God's purposes.

That being the case, the **force of holiness** is most evidenced in our weaknesses. Now, I am sure that makes you just as uneasy at it makes me. I don't like to be weak. I want to strong, always in control. But when I am determined to control by my strength, I become a like a frosted window that's blocking the light of God's love (and power) from reaching the eyes of others. In other words, I hide God's power behind my own feeble attempts to be powerful.

So how does God's power get revealed in us? How can we become clear panes of glass for others to see Christ at work in us – to see His power? How can we tap into the **force of holiness**? The first way is heightened expectations. Let's read verses 20-21, ***“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, 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.”*** Whatever you can imagine, the most audacious thing you can think of and ask for, beyond even that, God is able to do. It has been said that in the Christian church our problem is not the size of our faith but the size of our God. We often think of God as too small – unable to really do what we pray He will do. What a shame!!

The second way that we tap into the **force of holiness** is through changed lives. Whether you have been walking with Christ a day or a lifetime, you still have rough edges to knock off. If you have become so set in your ways that you cannot, or really will not change, then consider yourself, at least in part, a shuttered window. You may not believe it right now, but there are changes God needs to make in your heart. If you don't believe me, ask Him. Start praying for God to change your heart. You will be amazed, and so will all those who witness the change. And when that change comes, the net result is real righteousness – not one we manufacture, but righteousness that God works in us. The light of God's holiness shines into every corner of our heart, exposing the dust and dirt we have shoved out of sight. The more we walk with Him, the more we see how unlike Him we are and the more discontent we become about it. And, at that point we desperately want to change.

The third way, and this is a critical one, is through empowered ministry. When we use all the gifts God has given us to build up the church, amazing things happen. The church gets built up! We begin to sharpen one another the way that iron sharpens iron. Those rough edges we talked about are knocked off. And as the church is being built up, the **force of holiness** is revealed in two distinct ways. (1) Needs are being met and (2) evangelism reaches every heart. In harmony with the heightened expectations, it is okay for us to really want to see people come to Jesus Christ. It is okay to pray, "O God, let me share the message of the gospel with someone and see them turn to you!" People of God, it's okay to want power, so long as it is the **power** of holiness. Because in the **force of holiness**, the awesome dimensions of God's love are revealed and lives are changed. The pursuit of that kind of **power** is one that we can live with. It is one that is pleasing to God.