

The Power of Holiness
Ephesians 3:14-21

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In the 90's there was a sitcom called *Home Improvement*. In it, Tim Allen played a character known as the '*Tool Man*.'

The '*Tool Man*' taught us to agonize with the plight of man in a society that has decided it no longer wants to be male dominated.

He's the consummate chauvinist. A gearhead out of Detroit with a frat-boy sense of humor and a Viking's sensibility.

The sports arena, the hardware store, and the garage were where he was most at home. He even spoke fluent grunt.

And like the typical male, his nature was to try and fix things, whether he knew how to or not.

The mental and emotional discomfort that got stirred up when something didn't work as it should, whether machine or human, was too much for him, as it is for the average male.

The urge to fix, to make all things better, to bring order back to something breaking down into chaos always got the better of him.

His solution to fix something was always the same--it needed more power. Think about it, we like the word "power."

And most of us are the same. We like power. That's why we eat power bars, go for power walks, hire power brokers, and my personal favorite, take power naps.

Power is intoxicating, it's stimulating, and it's attractive. Power turns heads and opens doors; it both inspires and calms fears. We despise losing control. We want to be empowered.

The pursuit of power is what got Adam in trouble and landed us in a fallen world, a creation under the curse and a heart turned toward sin. And yet, Paul prays that we'll have power.

Ephesians 3:14-16, "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every 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."

Over the past couple of weeks, we've been examining different aspects of holiness. We've asked if holiness was passe and looked at the big picture.

We learned that holiness isn't just dos and don'ts, rather it's reflecting Christ in every area of our life.

Therefore today, as we close out our series on holiness today, we're going to talk about the power of holiness.

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So, just what is this power about which Paul is talking? In today's world, we understand power as control, something that's possessed; something that augments or enhances what's already there.

This is why it's easy to mis-understand Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3. Let me give you an example of someone who mis-understood this power for which Paul was praying.

In Acts 8:9-24 we're introduced to Simon the sorcerer. He heard the message of the good news, believed, and was baptized. Sadly, he was more interested in the miracles being performed than salvation.

Because, after seeing the manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon those whom the apostles touched and prayed for in Acts 8:15-17, Simon wanted this power, but he didn't understand for what he was asking.

Simon begged them to sell him that power so he could do the same. But he wanted to be able to share or withhold that blessing with whomever he chose. He wanted to profit from that power.

What Simon didn't understand, as well as many people today, is that when you begin talking about the power of holiness, you're not talking about receiving a new ability that allows you to do this or that.

It's not some sort of magical or miraculous power that suddenly shows up in our lives. We're not talking about becoming a superhero with superpowers.

Now, you may think, "*I know that.*" Yet, when we talk about power, we still think of it as some sort of endowment of ability that we're able to use at our discretion; something we can turn on or off at will.

We want to be able to control it, to harness it, and use it strategically. We want to be able to bring it to bear on specific applications.

But this isn't the power for which Paul prays. Such power would never suffice for what Paul had in mind.

Any power that would allow us to control or manipulate it to our own ends would fall short of what Paul hoped for those who read his letter.

I've known people who've claimed to have the gift of tongues. They described this gift as something they could turn on and off at will.

They believed that God had given them this wonderful ability for their own personal use.

In other words, they believed they had the power of God harnessed, so to speak, so they could use it to their own advantage whenever they felt the need.

Granted, the gift only benefited them in the area of faith, but it was still a powerful tool in their arsenal if it worked the way they described.

To put it in an old proverb, you can't put lightning in a bottle. And if you do, you better not open the bottle because you have no idea what'll happen next.

The Holy Spirit indwelling us and His power at work in us is holiness. It's not a spigot to be turned on at our convenience and then turned off when we no longer need it.

We can no more control how the Spirit works in our lives than we can control the earth's rotation around the sun.

All we can do is gratefully receive the power of the Spirit and pray for wisdom that we'll respond to it wisely.

Any talk of controlling the use of or the outcome of the power of God should immediately raise the hackles on our necks and send us running the opposite direction.

So, if the power of holiness isn't some sort of superpower for us to use in combating evil in the world as we see fit, what is it?

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul prays in several places that the members of the church will be given power, but it's not discretionary power that he prays for, rather it is compulsory power.

It's power that overcomes us and changes us in spite of resistance. Power that'll do in us what we can't do for ourselves. Listen as Paul continues in verses 14-19.

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Ephesians 3:14-19, *“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every 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 Lord’s holy people, 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 help understand the context of these verses, let me remind you of what Paul’s been saying to the Ephesians up to this point.

He began his letter to the Ephesians by exploring the big picture; that God has redeemed some of the fallen mass of humanity in order reveal the glory of His grace and to bring all things together under Jesus Christ.

Then Paul demonstrates that this is done by salvation and grace through faith. This is the only way that anyone is brought into a redeemed relationship with the Creator.

Therefore, God’s drawing both, Jew and Gentile, together in order to form one new people of God.

In fact, Paul 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’s because Paul was specifically tasked to bring in the Gentiles, in other words all the other nations and peoples who were not Jewish, that he now kneels before the Father and prays that they’ll 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'll become so familiar with the love of Christ that they can rattle off its dimensions the same way we can rattle off the square footage of our homes or the size of our waist.

But he also prays that we'll know the love of Christ beyond its dimensions. Paul knows that as we plumb the depths of Christ's love, we'll never get its full measure. It's beyond us.

So, he prays that we'll know that which exceeds our ability to know. That's quite a prayer, one that's seemingly impossible.

But let's not forget Who's at work here; the God Who's able to do immeasurably more than all we can think or imagine.

Now, why pray for something that seems like a given? God loves us, we love God. Isn't the natural progression of things that we'll grow to love Him more?

I mean, He died for us. That's a powerful motivator for us to love Him. But 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 intervention in our lives, without Him enabling us to believe the message, we still wouldn't believe. The power of holiness is God's power at work in us.

It's not some spiritual battery pack that we recharge and discharge at our discretion. It's not that we become powerful in the Spirit, rather it's God's Spirit that's powerful in us.

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The power of holiness is God Himself in action. The same power that flung the stars into space and formed the earth; the same power that called everything into existence is at work in you and me.

This same power is at work in every believer. And since it's the power of God at work in us, we must understand that this power isn't at our disposal for our selfish purposes. It must fulfill the purposes of God.

Those who preach that God's power is yours to use, i.e. to empower you to become wealthy and successful or to make your life pain free, don't understand the nature of God's power

These ministers who preach that God's power is ours to use as we see fit pervert the message of the gospel. The power of holiness must fulfill God's purposes not ours.

That being the case, the power of holiness is also evidenced in our weaknesses. I'm sure this makes you just as uneasy as it makes me. I don't like to be weak. I want to be strong. I want to be in control.

But when I'm determined to control by my strength, I become a like a frosted window – blocking the light of God's love and power from reaching the eyes of others.

When I'm determined to control by my strength, 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?

How can we tap into the power of holiness? Well, the first way is through heightened expectations.

Ephesians 3:20-21, *“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.”*

It's been said that the problem with the Christian church isn't the size of our faith but the size of our God. We often think of God as too small; that's He's unable to do what we pray for Him to do.

But it's okay to expect big things from God. Any God Who can create our universe, then enter into His creation as a creature to die in order to restore the relationship we broke, can easily do more than we can ask for or imagine.

Now, one caveat to remember is that the power of God must always accomplish the purposes of God. We must always remember that even Christ prayed, *“Not my will, but yours be done.”*

Another way that we tap into the power of holiness is through changed lives. Whether you've been walking with Christ a day or a lifetime, you still have rough edges that need to be knocked off.

If you've become so set in your ways that you can't, or won't change then consider yourself 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, even where you can't see it. You'll be amazed and so will those who witness the change.

Then, when that change comes, the net result is real righteousness, not one we manufacture, but a righteousness that God works in us.

The light of God's holiness will shine into every corner of your heart, exposing the dust and dirt you've shoved out of sight.

The more we grow like Him, the more we see how unlike Him we are and the more discontent we are about it. It's at that point we'll desperately want change.

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Conclusion

When we use the gifts that God has given us to build up the church, an amazing thing happens, the church gets built up!

We begin to sharpen one another the way that iron sharpens iron. Those rough edges that we talked about get knocked off.

And, as the church is built up, the power of holiness is revealed in needs being met and an evangelism that reaches the heart.

In concert with heightened expectations, it's okay for us to want to see people come to Jesus. It's okay to pray, *"O God, let me share the message of the gospel with someone and see them turn to you!"*

It's okay to want power, so long as it's the power of holiness. Because in the power of holiness, the dimensions of God's love are revealed and lives are changed.

The pursuit of that power is one that we can live with eternally.