

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes November 7, 2007

Ephesians 3:20 - 4:3

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

21: to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

1: I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

2: with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love,

3: eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Introduction:

- As I mentioned last week, one of the biggest problems throughout the 2000 year history of Christianity involves the struggle of believers living according to what they say they believe, or to use the common syllogism: walk the talk. We believe that God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit has redeemed us by the power of Christ's blood, that He has made us alive again when we were dead in sin, that He has reconciled us to one another, we are one in Christ. This is true, but sadly Christians don't always live as if this is true. Why not? God has done His part; now it's time for us to do ours. This is what we will discuss today on **Deep In Scripture**.

Discussion:

- Welcome....website ... Phone numbers ... special:
- REVIEW:
 - In our study of Ephesians, we have been approaching this epistle from the assumption that it was written by St. Paul while in prison as a homily to be read, by the leaders he converted and appointed in Ephesus, in the weekly liturgy to the newly baptized Gentile believers, whose faith and love St. Paul had heard about from messengers.
 - In Chapters 1-3, "preaches" on the three changes that happen in our lives by grace once we have heard, believed, and then been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism. Through baptism we are changed in three ways: "up, beside, and within"
 - 2:1-10 ⇨ "up" or the healing of our vertical separation from God due to sin;
 - By grace, we can now love God...
 - 2:11-22 ⇨ "beside" or the healing of our horizontal relationships "in the flesh";
 - By grace, we can now love neighbor.
 - 3:14-19 ⇨ "within" or the healing of our soul / heart & mind = "in the inner man"
 - By grace, we can now grow to become what we should have been before sin.
 - These have already happened in those who have heard, believed, & been baptized, BUT this is only the beginning!
 - Though these changes are all given freely by grace, yet we must **continue** in them, also by grace, for in the spiritual battle we can become distracted away.
 - St. Paul admits, in Philipians 3, that even he is still on the journey, and we are to imitate him.
- Last week, with Dr. Howell, we began discussing verses 3:20-4:3, which serve as the transition between what God has done in our lives and what we now must do in response.
 - Chapters 1-3 are what God has done; chapters 4-6 are what we must do.
 - But remembering that originally this letter from St. Paul had no chapters and verse division, today's verses stand as an interesting & powerful description of the interconnection between what God has done by grace and what we now must do by grace.

- Last week because of Dr. Howell's availability and interest, we jumped ahead to verses 4:1-3, so this week, Jim & I will back up to verses 3:20-21, the Doxology.

And like last week, were going to use the bible study method we call, "**Reduce to the min, interpret to the max,**" to glean the significant meaning of this passage. This technique involves reducing a verse down to its most simply statement by removing all additional clauses and modifiers. Then we study what's left to discover the basic idea that was on St. Paul's mind. Then we add each clause or modifier back into the verse, one at a time, asking, "Why was it important in St. Paul's mind to add this?"

- This technique is based on our common experiences of what we do all the times whenever we have one specific thing to say but then add on qualifiers or amplifiers.
 - Let's say you want to warn your teenage son simply, "Don't do it!" But before you utter a word, you realize the bold exhortation may not be received as you'd like. So you say, "My son, I realize that everyone you know does it, and that you really, really want to do it, and that when I was young I unfortunately succumbed to temptation and regretfully did it, still I beg of you, please, don't do it." It may be that in the end, the qualifying phrases I added had a stronger impact on stopping son than the simple exhortation itself. And so is true with Scripture. It isn't that the qualifying phrases are more or less important than the simple core statement, for all of the words were inspired. Rather some of the most beautiful gems of St. Paul's convictions come out in his qualifying statements. This method of "reducing to the min then interpreting to the max" is a helpful way of hearing all of what St. Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, intended to say.
- This technique also helps us avoid a common problem in Bible study, especially with long verses like the ones we have been studying in Ephesians. With long verses with lots of modifying phrases, its easy to lock our attention onto a portion of a verse, possibly because of our own immediate interests or situation, and then miss the author's original intended meaning. This is particularly true with today's verse. Beginning by reading with verse 20 ... one can lock in on the idea of how much God can do for me, and then miss the intended meaning of this doxology. By "reducing this passage to the minimum," we can first discover St. Paul's intended focus, and then by "interpreting to the max" we can see the context for what God can and does do in our lives.

So, let's look at verses 3:20-21. Here St. Paul is concluding his homily with a doxology, and the simplest form of this, removing modifying clauses and words is:

"Now to him ... be glory"

- **In this he returns to the beginning of his homily and sums it all up:**
 - He began his homily with praise and throughout he emphasizes that our response to God for what He has done should always be praise.
 - In 1: 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...";
 - In 1:11-14, "In him ... we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live **for the praise of his glory** ... In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit ... **to the praise of his glory.**"
 - Then here, at the end of chapter 3, he concludes this 1st portion of his homily with praise.
- **What does it mean to say, "to Him be glory ..."?**

Now, let's start adding back some of the things we left out:

- "Now to him **who by the power at work ... is able to do ... more ... than all that we ask or think...**"
 - **Why did St. Paul add this into his intended statement?** *[He may have been concerned, either just guessing from personal experience or from reports, that they were losing heart because they weren't receiving objective confirmation of these changes in their lives by grace. They had been promised and believed what they had been told, but their lives*

seemed the same, if not worse!]

- **So St. Paul reminds them of two very important truths we must never forget:**
 1. **“God is powerfully at work”:** [Don’t get so distracted by the mundane problems of life and forget that God is always powerfully at work: PROVIDENCE!].
 2. **“He is able to do ... more than all that we ask or think”:** [Don’t be limited by doubts or small thinking!]

- **But there are several more key words that St. Paul included (which we had left out):**
 - “Now to him who by the power at work **within us...**” [He is not just powerfully at work in the world around us, but within us, which is the sum of what St. Paul has been teaching them so far.]

 - “is able to do **far** more **abundantly** than all that we ask or think...” [Not just more than we can imagine, but far more abundantly. Don’t put limits on God!]
- **The tension between Scriptures promising blessings verses those promising suffering:**
 - **“Faith leads to abundant blessings!”**
 - “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” (Ps 34:6)
 - “Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will dwell in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart...the meek shall in possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.” Ps 37:3-4,11
 - “Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.” Lk 6:38
 - “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.” Jn 15:7
 - **BUT faith also involves even requires suffering:**
 - “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” Jn 15:18
 - “a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Cor 12:7-9
 - “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, **we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.**” Rom 5:1-5
 - “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**” Rom 8:15-17
 - “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. **But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.**” 1 Ptr 4:12
 - **So how do we balance these verses?**
 - This is specifically what St. Paul is addressing in this passage: “...by the power at work within us [He] is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.”
 - In the early stages of our journey of faith, what we “ask or think” we want or need may still be tainted by sin and self-centeredness...
 - But as we surrender to him and grow in grace, in the ways St. Paul has been discussing in chapters 1-3, our desires and needs change; we grow in our understanding of the need for detachment. this is what both Jesus and his apostles taught:
 - “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as

well" (Mt 6:33).

- *"Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. ... And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Phil 4:11-13,19-20).*

But there are still other words and phrases that St. Paul added to his primary thought:

- **"...to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus"**
 - *Specifically, the glory of God is demonstrated in BOTH Christ and His body, the Church (1:22-23).*
- **"...to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations...."**
 - *With "to all generations" St. Paul emphasizes that this is but the beginning!*
 - *Jesus had emphasized to his apostles that their work was neither local nor limited to their lifetime:*
 - *"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Mt 28:18-20*
 - *"...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8*
- **"to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen.**
 - *Here St. Paul, caught up in his praise of God, draws our attention to eternity.*
 - *In fact, in the Greek, this phrase literally means "into the eternity of the eternities" or "into the age of the ages."*
 - *As Christians have continuously proclaimed throughout the centuries, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."*
 - *Whenever we truly focus on the beauty and power and glory of God, it should draw us to worship Him.*

When using this technique, it's always best, after we've examined all the phrases and words, to return to the entire text, read it in its entirety, and then meditate on its meaning, given all we've studied:

And may St. Paul's doxology inspire us this day in our walk of faith:

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen."