# THE IMMEASURABLE GREATNESS OF GOD'S MAJESTY & POWER

#### Introduction

As we approach the end of our series about God's immense majesty and power, it is time to take a brief look behind us and remember the path we have taken to bring us to this point in our journey. Reviewing the things we have studied in God's Word moves His inspired and infallible truths from our short-term memories to our long-term memories and prepares us to live lives that are pleasing to Him. Even if we only have time to locate the primary thesis in each lecture, it can provide focus for the whole and have a profound impact on our hearts and minds as we seek to live for His glory. Samuel Johnson reminds us that "the chief art of learning is to attempt but a little at a time. The widest excursions of the mind are made by short flights frequently repeated."

#### Fall Series on God's Majesty & Power

- Part 1: Introduction
- Part 2: The Attributes of God
- Part 3: God's Attribute of Power
- Part 4: El Shaddai
- Part 5: The Power of Jesus
- Part 6: The Vanity of Pursuing Personal Power
- Part 7: Power in Weakness
- Part 8: Theological Perspectives on Election Results
- Part 9: *Mighty in Prayer*





#### A Summary of What We Have Learned

- God's attributes tell us who God really and truly is.
- God's omnipotence is the doctrine that God is able to do all His holy will.
- God is *El Shaddai*, God Almighty.
- Christ is the power of God.
- The way from below is power for the sake of being powerful.
- Power is made perfect in weakness.
- God's larger governance of the world includes the civil government.

#### Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

- "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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21, *English Standard Version*).
- "God can do anything, you know far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us" (Eph. 3:20, *The Message*).
- "Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope" (Eph. 3:20, *New Living Translation*).

# *Exegesis:* Interpreting the Text

- The word *exegesis* is a compound word from the preposition *ex* (from, away from) and the verb *hegeomai* (to lead or guide). The Greek word means *explanation, interpretation.* An interpreter of Scripture, then, examines a document from the past and discovers what each statement meant to the original writer and to the original hearers or readers *in their own present time*. It is a reading *out of* the text.
- The interpreter's task is to faithfully point out the true meaning that should be conveyed to the modern reader.
- *Eisegesis,* on the other hand, is a reading *into* the text and substitutes the authority of the interpreter for the authority of the original writer.

# Let's Examine the Text

- Paul's words to the Ephesian church begin this way: "To Him who is able." This Greek word for power is **dunamis** (cf. dynamite), n., and means "power, might, strength, force."
- According to Kittel, "the term *dunamis* can be applied over the whole range of life." This includes physical and physiological powers, as well as spiritual and intellectual powers.
- The OED defines it as the "ability to act or affect something strongly; physical or mental strength; might; vigor, energy; effectiveness."
- The correct understanding of these first two Greek words is that "He (the Triune God) is *able*." He is "*abundant in power*" (Ps. 147:5).

# God Is Able to Do All Things

- What is God able to do? Paul claims that God is able "to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" – "to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope" (NLT).
- The words "to do all things" paints a true picture of Almighty God. We have already noted that His power is *immense*. There are no bounds to His power. "Ah, Lord God! It is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your out-stretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer. 32:17).
- According to Scripture, God's power is infinite and absolute, the standard of power. Therefore, He is **able** to do that which he will not do but is **possible** to be done.

# Beyond Your Wildest Dreams!

- The next word in our text is a Greek adverb meaning *quite beyond all measure*, the highest form of comparison imaginable. Another Greek lexicon translates it as *"super-abundantly"* (Liddell & Scott).
- William Hendriksen's commentary on this text is the best I have seen: "In order to appreciate fully what is implied in these words it should be noted that Paul's reasoning has taken the following steps: (a) God is able to do all we ask him to do; (b) he is even able to do all that we dare not ask but merely imagine; (c) he can do *more* than this; (d) far more; (e) very far more."
- "This is the strongest kind of an encouragement for us to ask him" (Lenski). We are looking at a word that denotes a **vast superlative**!

# God's Power Within Us

- The language that Paul uses at the end of verse 20 reveals that God's omnipotence in answering our prayers is not a figment of our imaginations but is in line with His mighty "power at work within us."
- God has already called us, regenerated our hearts through the working of the Holy Spirit, justified us by grace through faith, adopted us into His forever family, forgiven us for all of our sins by Jesus' death on the cross, imputed His righteousness to us, and is sanctifying us so that we can be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and, one day, be glorified. So, His power has already been at work *within us*.
- In summary, God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.

# Our Key Take-Aways

- Paul has given us a doxology of *hope*.
- When we read "God is able," we should not think of power apart from His mighty acts, but power which is *actually exerted* and which *we can actually perceive* (Calvin).
- "However many blessings we expect from God, His infinite liberality will always *exceed* all our wishes and our thoughts" (Calvin).
- God superabundantly outdoes all that we ask or think. We are naturally limited in our desires and what we think God is capable of doing, leading some to avoid petitionary prayer. God will grant to us and to the church His goodness, and He will be eternally glorified.



#### Praying Beyond Our Small Requests

- "God will not do a bit more through you than you have faith for" (Rees Howells).
- Isn't it true that when you have thought all you can think about God's power, your souls will prompt you to conceive something greater than what you have thought?
- "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Lk. 18:27; cf. Mt. 19:26).
- "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14; Lk. 1:36).

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# C.S. Lewis' Essay on Prayer

- On December 8, 1953, C.S. Lewis read his essay, *Petitionary Prayer: A Problem without a Solution*, to the Oxford Clerical Society.
- The essay appeared for the first time in 1967 in a compilation of Lewis' works under the title *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper (Lewis did not prepare this essay for publication).

#### The Problem

The problem Lewis addressed was confined only to "that kind of prayer which consists of request or petition."

#### **The Problem Stated**

"My problem arises from one fact and one only; the fact that Christian teaching seems at first sight to contain two different patterns of petitionary prayer which are inconsistent: perhaps inconsistent in their theological implications, but much more obviously and pressingly inconsistent in the practical sense that no man, so far as I can see, could possibly follow them both at the same moment."



# "Pattern A"

- This pattern is given in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done."
- In the light of this great submission surrender to the will of God nothing can be asked except conditionally.
- The other example of "Pattern A" praying is found in our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."





# "Pattern A" Praying

"....nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

# Inference

- It would seem that we are being directed by our Lord's command and example to make all our petitionary prayers in this conditional form.
- With this pattern of prayer, "I myself would be wholly content" and "as far as my intellect goes it is all easy."
- Whatever faith the petitioner has in the existence, goodness, and the wisdom of God, what he obviously does not have is a "sure and unwavering belief that God will give him the particular thing he asks for."
- Did Jesus really expect that His Father would remove the cup of suffering from Him? His words imply that it will not be removed.

#### The Place of Faith

- If we are expected to imitate Jesus in our prayers, we are not to pray with any assurance that we shall receive what we ask.
- Real assurance that we shall receive it seems to be incompatible with the act of preparing ourselves for a denial.
- People do not prepare for an event which they think impossible.

#### "Pattern B"

Over and over in the New Testament, we find the demand for a particular faith: faith that the particular thing the petitioner asks will be given him.



#### **Relevant New Testament Passages**

- "Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, 'Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well'" (Matt. 9:22).
- "And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.' And the servant was healed at that very moment" (Matt. 8: 13).
- "Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly" (Matt. 15:28).
- "When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then he touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it done to you.' And their eyes were opened" (Matt. 9:28-29).

#### **Relevant New Testament Passages**

- "So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord save me.' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'" (Matt. 14:29-31).
- Peter lost his faith and sank in the waves.

## C.S. Lewis on Peter

"For it would seem that St. Peter might have had any degree of faith in the goodness and power of God and even in the Deity of Christ and yet been wholly uncertain whether he could continue walking on the water."



#### What is Peter Accused Of?

- If Peter had submitted himself "in the spirit of the Gethsemane prayer, he would have prepared himself, so far as infirmity allowed, to glorify God either by living or by drowning, and his failure, if he failed, would have been due to an imperfect mortification or instinct but not to a lack (in that sense) of faith."
- The faith which is he accused of lacking must surely be faith in the particular event.

## Matthew 21:21-22

- "And Jesus answered them, 'Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown in the sea," it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."
- At the very least, Jesus must mean doing some mighty work.
- "The point is that the condition of doing such a mighty work is unwavering, unhesitating faith."
- "Can we even here take *faith* to mean 'having a general faith in the power and goodness of God'? We cannot."



#### What Are We To Believe?

"We are not to believe that we shall get either what we ask or else something far better; we are to believe that we shall get those very things. It is a faith, unwavering faith in that event, to which success is promised."

# What Does God Mean?

- "Dare we say that when God promises 'You shall have what you ask' He secretly means 'You shall have it if you ask for something I wish to give you'?"
- What should we think of an earthly father who promised to give his son whatever he chose for his birthday and, when the boy a asked for a bicycle, gave him an arithmetic book?
- "Of course the arithmetic book may be better for the son than the bicycle, and a robust faith may manage to believe so. That is not where the difficulty, the sense of cruel mockery, lies. The boy is tempted, not to complain that the bicycle was denied, but that the promise of 'anything he chose' was made. So with us."

# Lewis' Conclusion

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"I have no answer to my problem, though I have taken it to about every Christian I know, learned or simple, lay or clerical, within my own Communion or without."

## One Final, Hesitant Observation

- Whatever else faith may mean, "I feel quite sure that it does not mean any state of psychological certitude such as might be manufactured from within by the natural action of a strong will upon an obedient imagination."
- The faith that moves mountains is a **gift from Him who created mountains**.

"No man can do a great and enduring work for God who is not a man of prayer, and no man can be a man of prayer who does not give much time to praying."

- E.M. Bounds