

#176 “Beyond All That We Ask or Think”

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Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” There are two opposing paradigms for understanding how God views and treats His children. One is biased towards God being stingy and enjoying our suffering as if He delights in our struggles and hardship. This view tends to believe that we are what we make of ourselves in life and that we need to be tough, strong, and self-willed according to our own fleshly energies. This requires a view of God that is less than perfectly loving, caring, sensitive, gentle, and intimate. It creates a lifestyle of fear and worry and of performance and earning God’s favor. The other view is drastically different, but it swings the pendulum too far the other way. This view sees God as a cosmic genie Who caters to our wants and needs if only we would ask Him in faith for what we think we need or want. The power is said to be in our faith rather than in the character of God. Therefore, this view, believing that God would only desire us to be happy, healthy, and wealthy, minimizes the sovereignty of God and exalts the power of man. Neither of these views match the Biblical account of the character of God and the nature of His love for His children. Ephesians 3:20-21 is sufficient, however, to strike the proper balance.

Paul says clearly with great joy and emotion that God is so able, sufficient, and powerful that He can do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. So, suppose we have a need or want. It is one thing to know and believe that God cares about those things, but it is another altogether to believe what Paul is exclaiming about God in this passage. Paul says that we can take what we might ask God for and imagine the greatest thing that God could do to meet our need or want. Of course, God is not bound by our imagination; in fact, Paul’s point is that even the best thing that we could imagine is far short of what God is able to provide, create, work out, and accomplish. God is able to do beyond what we ask of Him and beyond what we think He can or would do. In fact, He is able to do abundantly beyond what we ask or think. Yet it doesn’t stop there. He is able to do far more abundantly beyond what we ask or think. Our feeble asking and thinking about God’s work is so small compared with what God is and with what He does. What God does and Who He is goes far beyond our wildest imagination. His love is so profound that it confounds our minds’ ability to understand it. This is why, as Paul says, He deserves all glory and praise.

God is not a grouchy, legalistic, embittered killjoy. He enjoys giving good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11), and it is from Him that every perfect gift is given (James 1:17). Thus, God is not just able to give perfect gifts, but He is eager and willing to do so in His perfect way. Perfect is so beyond what imperfect people like us can process through and imagine. How often do we pray and trust God for perfect gifts? Too often we settle for something just okay or something of our own making. Rather, we would be so much

better off waiting for God to provide a perfect gift. Some people think they know perfect, and they want God to give them that which they have conceived in their minds right now. God has a higher and greater plan, to give something even beyond what we can ask or think if only we would be willing to trust Him, surrender to Him, and wait for His perfect timing and provision.

A perfect gift may be a divine provision at just the right time. It might be a lesson or insight that we can only credit the grace of God for teaching us. It might be a manifestation of the kindness of God through protection or deliverance that we didn't even know we needed. It might be a perfect gift of an imperfect person who loves a perfect Savior. We should pray for the perfect pastor, the perfect spouse, the perfect church, the perfect home, etc. God cares enough to do even beyond that prayer. Now, let us be sure that we understand that there is no morally perfect person or church, but there is a perfect gift of all those things because there is a perfect Giver behind the gifts. He gives to us in such a way and at such a time that we can say that God hasn't ever shortchanged us. In fact, He has always and only given us beyond what we had hoped for and envisioned. In that way, His gifts are perfect, lacking nothing, and complete for their intended purpose.

Lastly, we should note that God does far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us. It doesn't say according to us or according to our own power. It says according to the power that works in us which is none other than Jesus Christ Himself (Galatians 2:20). The reason God loves His children so deeply is not because of what is in us but because of Who is in us. God loves His Son so much that He can't help but love those who have received Him with the same love that He has for His only begotten Son. We may be adopted into His family, but we are not discriminated against. We are certainly not the rejected child, the less favored offspring, or orphans. We have a Father in heaven Who loves us so powerfully and so wonderfully that He can and does do perfect things for us, things beyond that which we could ever ask for or imagine.