

## “Powerful Prayer”

*Ephesians 3:13-21*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • June 3, 2018

I am willing to bet that most of you would agree that change is difficult. I’m talking about personal change – you making some kind of major change in your life. Of course I’m talking about positive change. Changing for the worse is usually not too hard. If you’ve ever tried to lose weight or stop smoking you know what I mean. We especially do this around the first of the year. You might say, “I’m going to start exercising three days a week,” or “I’m going to floss twice a day.” Perhaps some of you have tried to change because your doctor told you to and that if you don’t change bad things will happen.

So you start with good intentions. You convince yourself that you really are going to change. You even pray and ask God to help you change, or more likely you pray and ask God just to change you. But it seems that no matter how hard you try you just don’t have the power to change. After only a few weeks your old ways begin creeping in and before you know it you’re right back where you were.

This morning the Apostle Paul shares with us the secret to lasting change in our life: it’s *love!* Just like the Beatles told us. In this case, love refers to our affections. The reality is that what you love will always drive what you do. You will never lose those twenty pounds if you love cookies more than you love losing weight. This explains why some people have no trouble exercising nearly every day. They love exercising. If you don’t love exercising you will always find it a burden, but if you love it you will find it easy to get motivated.

The same concept applies to our relationships. Conflicts between people, whether it’s conflict between spouses or between family members or between co-workers or between church members, can certainly be very complex, but almost always the root of the problem is from the people involved loving themselves more than they love the other person. If you are having some kind of

conflict in your life let me suggest you try resolving it Jesus’ way, which is self-sacrifice. Decide that you are going to love that other person more than you love yourself and see if God doesn’t show up in that relationship. As we will see in this passage from Ephesians 3, the power to do something, whether it’s losing weight or resolving a conflict, comes from the love that motivates your actions.

This morning we find the Apostle Paul describing his prayers for the Christians in Ephesus and he says he prays for them to be strengthened with power. But what is it that motivates Paul to pray for them? In verse 14 he says, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.” Paul is actually continuing what he had begun to say at the beginning of chapter 3, which means that to find out the reason he’s praying we have to look at the end of chapter 2. There he paints that beautiful word picture of the Gentiles being included as “fellow citizens and members of the household of God,” and being built into the temple of God. People from every nation are included as living stones in God’s temple. Paul is saying that he prays often that the Ephesians would understand this more and more.

Paul’s prayer is that they would be “strengthened with power.” What kind of power? I’m pretty sure he doesn’t mean political power. I think he means the power to change, power over sin. We would do well to pray for the same thing. So how do we get this power? Paul says he prays that God “may grant you to be strengthened with power *through his Spirit* in your inner being.” By the way, the word “power” is from the Greek word *dunamis*, which is where we get the word dynamite. We’re talking about real power, and it’s the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

The power to change comes from the Holy Spirit and it’s the result of love. But it also results in love. More specifically, the power to change comes from loving Jesus more than you

love other things in your life. Paul's prayer is that the Ephesians (and you and me) would begin to understand how much Jesus loves us and that we would respond by loving Jesus more. It builds on top of each other, like climbing a ladder. The more I understand Jesus' sacrificial love for me, the more I love him sacrificially, and so on.

Paul goes on to stretch our minds a little. He says he wants us to "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." Is he saying he wants us to know something that can't be known? Yes and no. What he's saying is that the more we know about God's love for us, the more we discover that there is to know. In other words, we can never exhaust God's love and mercy and grace. There is always more to discover about it.

In verses 17-19 we begin to get the "why." Paul prays that you would be "strengthened with power through God's Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." This phrase "rooted and grounded" is a bit of a mixed metaphor. Rooted is an agricultural reference while grounded is architectural, referring to the foundation of a building. The roots of a tree are what hold the tree upright, just as the foundation of a building is what supports it.

The idea here is that the love of Christ is what supports us, keeps us upright, and nourishes us. If we are "rooted and grounded" in Christ we will be better able to know "what is the breadth and length and height and depth" of his love because we experience it first hand. I love the perspective Dr. Bryan Chappel gives us on this verse. He writes, "Paul says God's love for his people is as long as eternity past, so wide as to include all nations, so high as to ring praises from angels in heaven, and so deep as to cancel the claims of hell on our soul." I pray

that we would have the strength to comprehend that.

So power, power over sin, the power to change, comes through love – loving Christ and being loved by him. If we want to experience this kind of love and power it seems to me there are three keys to putting it into practice. The first key is obviously getting to know Jesus better. Every one of us needs to do this and the best way is by spending quality time with Jesus. Read the gospels. That's where you find out what Jesus did and said.

The second key is to spend quality time in the Body of Christ. We've talked about this before. The Church is a family and verse 15 of our passage emphasizes the point. "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." That's the Church. If you are a Christian you have God as your Father and you have all Christians as your brothers and sisters. Paul emphasizes the Church again in verse 18 when he prays that the Ephesians "may have strength to comprehend *with all the saints* what is the breadth and length and height and depth...of the love of Christ." Together we are much more able to comprehend God's love for us than we are on our own.

Finally, the third key is prayer. I think one of the reasons many of us don't experience power in prayer is that we have low expectations. We don't ask God to work in our lives because we doubt that he can or will. We suffer from small thinking, at least I know I do. But this passage ends with one of the greatest benedictions in the Bible. "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."

God is certainly able to do anything. He spoke the whole universe into existence. He loves to work in our lives and as you just heard, he works according to the power that is already at work in us. That power is nothing less than the power that raised Jesus from the dead. You have God's resurrection power working in you.

Otherwise you probably wouldn't be here. But too often we don't ask God to work.

So here's the challenge. Spend some time reading one of the gospels. Get to know Jesus a little better. Start praying for one area where you want God to show up in your life. Pray that Christ would dwell more and more in your heart. Pray that you would be able to

comprehend *with all the saints* how much God loves you. Go and love other people with that same love that you receive from Jesus, a sacrificial, forgiving love. If you do I promise that you will experience God's power.

*Amen.*