

The Righteousness of Doxology

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[0 : 00] Just by way of introduction, I want you to think with me just for a moment about some of the!

Let's look at indications in Scripture about the love of God for us. This series that we've been dealing with in the book of Ephesians, beginning actually there in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14, where Paul starts out by saying, for this cause I bow my knees before the Father.

I want you to think with me just for a moment, just in your own mind, I want you to think to yourself, what are some of the explicit statements in Scripture that tell you God loves you?

I'm not going to ask you to respond to them, but I will tell you this. Were you a Muslim, the idea of God caring about you personally, loving you, would be like over top.

If you were a Hindu, you'd miss that one. If you're a Buddhist, nowhere in the picture. And the Scriptures are filled with reminders of the undeniable certainty that God loves us.

[1 : 32] One of the ones I thought about is actually in the book of Deuteronomy where it says this. It says, yea, he loved the people, he gave them his law. This book tells me he loves me.

It's good. Ephesians chapter 3 verse 20 and 21 is the conclusion to this absolutely spectacular, unbelievable prayer.

Actually, it's a prayer that we don't pray very often, and we should. And it's a prayer that evidently, as Paul was bringing it to a close, he recognized under the prompting of the Spirit of God that the people there in Ephesus, and by extension those of you who are here today and me, need to be reminded, go ahead, pray it.

Ask. How many of you remember dating in junior high? Now, there's some of you that haven't gotten there yet, and your parents are, I saw that one, yeah.

Some of you are just like, yeah, I remember that. Dumb. One of the things about dating in junior high is that it's always done through emissaries and advocates. Do you know what I'm saying?

[3 : 08] How many of you understand that? When you like so-and-so, you don't have the guts to go ask her yourself, so you kind of beat around the bush with one of your close friends in hopes that they will do what?

Yeah, yeah. It's all right. Go ahead and ask her. She won't turn you down. Your psyche, your pride can't bear rejection, so there you are. Now, in my day, we did very mundane things, like we went to skating parties, you know, and the girls would be on one side and the boys on the other side, and you'd sit over there with this high degree of anxiety wondering, will she, won't she?

And so you'd kind of nudge your friend, and he would zing over there and talk to one of the friends that he knew, and that friend would ask her. It was a long and arduous process, but eventually you'd get the news.

Go ahead, ask. You needed help. And Paul, here in verse 20, after having really opened up this subject of a profoundly significant prayer, wants to give us some encouragement.

So I want us to look at that encouragement that we find here to trust. Verse 20 says, Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

[4 : 45] Amen. I want you to think with me and recognize that actually the things that we pray about are really revealing spiritually. They tell people. They tell us.

They tell God where our thinking is, the things that we care about, we bring forward. They indicate what we are really focused in on. And we pick up there in verse 14.

We find that Paul, instead of praying for all the different kinds of things that a lot of times you hear people praying for, here was his singular interest. He says, listen, here's the one thing that I want

you to have the power of the Spirit of God work in your life that you would be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the height, the width and the depth of the love of Christ. And then he goes on and says that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now that's a pretty audacious prayer, isn't it? You're asking for a lot. You really are. I want you to stop with me just for a moment and think back to the book of Genesis in the garden when Adam and Eve were together there and they'd been given that prohibition, do not eat of the tree of the fruit there in the center.

Don't eat that. And Satan comes along and he says, hey, listen, if you eat that tree, you're going to be like God. Paul's prayer is not on the same page.

[6 : 11] I do want you to understand that. But nevertheless, Paul's prayer is this, that having understood and comprehended the love of Christ, that you would then enjoy the fullness of God.

That's significant. And in the face of that, I think it's important for us to understand that this encouragement to pray this way is fitting.

We say that Paul asks that we would have this fullness in God. And you can understand that we'd probably be tempted to say, well, Paul, that's a little much. That's a stretch.

But I do want you to understand that behind this prayer is an understanding. And we recognize that all prayer that God hears is rooted in God's character.

It's rooted in God's work. And I can't help but think about the passage in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6. And some of you may want to turn to that passage, Hebrews 11, 6, where it says, they that come to God, can anybody finish it for me?

[7 : 18] Must believe that he is and that he is the rewarder of them that do diligently seek him. Whoever wants to draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards them who seek him.

And so as we think about this subject of Paul encouraging our prayer, we have to recognize that we can trust God to answer because nothing is beyond his ability. You look at that passage, it says, now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we could ask or think.

And so as Paul reminds us and encourages us to pray, he says, listen, one of the reasons you go ahead and pray this way, Lord, I want to comprehend with all the saints the love of Christ.

That's what I want to understand. I really want that. He says, go ahead and ask it. Because God's able to answer all the questions and heartaches and issues that you have.

And as I think about this, I'm reminded of how often Jesus kind of challenged his own disciples while he was with them to stretch their minds that they would understand a little bit more about who he was and what he could do.

[8 : 34] Let me have you think of one of the illustrations of that. Turn over, turn back actually to John chapter 6. And John chapter 6, verse 9, or John chapter 6, verse 5.

Through 9, we find a situation developing here. Peter, or Philip, is standing there near Jesus and there is a large crowd gathered.

And so Jesus turns to Philip and says, hey, where are we going to buy bread so that these people may eat? Now it's like, why are you asking me?

I just happen to be one of the flunkies. I've come along for the party. Don't be bothering me with that kind of detail. And he is kind of blown away by that. And look at his answer. Philip answered him. Now Philip must have been a little bit of an accountant. You know, I would have said, I don't know. But Philip had to get a number to this thing. You notice that? He says, yeah, 200 denarii would not buy enough for each one of these to have a little.

[9 : 32] I mean, that 200 days wages would not have 5,000 men. That didn't include the women and children. And that is a large crowd.

We've had a number of open houses in the last several days. And there are several more going on. And one of the things that comes with graduations is everybody puts on a feed.

And I was talking with someone who said, yeah, we cooked 43 pounds of chicken. I don't know how many people walked through that yard, but nothing like 5,000.

Do you follow me? And when Philip is asked this question, he says, I have no idea. It's interesting, though, that after they're getting everybody seated, Andrew, who was kind of a detail person, he comes up and you can kind of hear him there in the verse.

He says, well, we got a little boy here. Verse 9. There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they for so many?

[10:34] Five barley loaves and two fish. Now, by the way, that represented lunch for how many boys? One boy.

His mother had packed it thoughtfully. And he was the only person in the entire crowd that was duly equipped for the challenge of that day. And when Andrew comes, oh, there is.

What do you have in that bag? Well, I've got five fish or five loaves and two fish. And Andrew says, well, okay, that kid's taken care of him. Goes back to Jesus and said, well, here's the deal.

Listen. As it was, the challenge was very easy to overcome for Jesus, wasn't it? And by the way, do you think he actually needed to have barley loaves and fish in order to pull the miracle off?

What's the answer? He could have produced it out of nothing. You see, Paul makes it clear, and I go back to that passage in Ephesians chapter 3.

[11:34] Paul makes it clear that God can do more than we can ask. I do like the order in which Paul puts things here. You'll notice that, first of all, there in verse 20, he speaks about God can do far more abundantly than we can ask.

And generally when we ask, our asking flows out of our imagination of the probability of getting an answer to that request. Isn't that right? We ask what we think can possibly be done.

A number of years ago when Judith and I lived over on Angaro Drive, we had a very interesting phone number. It was 279-2800. Now, it sounds business-y, doesn't it? And for some strange reason, Judith and I got periodic calls for people asking if we would do an oil change.

I never got into oil changes, and I would never respond. I said, you got the wrong number. I said, this is a private residence. We don't do oil changes. The other thing that we got calls on periodically was pizza delivery.

And in my perverse nature, when people would say, I'd like to order a pizza, guess what I would do? I'd say, go right ahead. And I'd take the details down. You want pepperoni on one half, and you want mushroom on the other, and you want, you know, blah, blah, blah.

[12:55] I said, okay, well, that'll be a while. And I'd say, well, how long is it going to take, and how much is it going to cost? I would usually come out with something like about \$89. And it'll be a couple hours.

And then I would get these explosions on the phone. It's like, what? I can't believe that. How do you stay in business? I said, well, I'm really not in business. We're a private residence. But I would be glad to do a pizza for you.

The pizza was within my skill set, and I let them know I'd help them. I never got return calls from those people. I don't tell you the story to entertain you, but here's the deal.

When we ask God, we ask Him for the things we think He can do. And Paul says, you can ask for more than that. You can ask for more than that.

And what Paul is saying is, go ahead. Go beyond what you would normally ask for. And let me challenge you to think with me here a little bit about how we should ask.

[14:06] One of the things that it says over in James 1, it says, let him ask in what? In faith, nothing doubting. Remember the substance or the context of the prayer here is Paul is saying to the believers there in Ephesus, I want you to pray that you would comprehend the love that Christ has for you, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul says, go ahead and ask. I would appeal to you as you ask, you go ahead and say this. And I think it's an indicator of the sincerity of your heart. Lord, I want you to do whatever it takes to help me grow to understand who you are and your love.

You see, a lot of times we're asking for things without an earnestness and without a desire to go through the process that God has ordained to get us there.

Oh, I would like to be a rocket scientist and I want to be able to play Angry Birds at the same time. You know, it doesn't work that way. You want to be a rocket scientist? God will take you the rocket science journey and he'll get you there.

Lord, whatever it takes, work in me to give me a heart for you. Now look at what else he says there. He says, God can also do more than we can think about.

[15:29] We may be hesitant on occasion to ask. But we probably all dreamed on other moments where, well, I wonder if he could do that.

And here is Paul saying, go ahead. He can answer needs that you have. He can do beyond what you can imagine. And I want you to look at the remainder of the verse because it really gives us some practical, down-to-earth encouragement to ask.

Look at what it says there. It says, according to the power at work within us. He says, you can ask more than you can imagine.

But he says, and you can ask on the basis of the power that is at work in you. And so let me help you think about this in practical terms. God can answer in the same way that he has been working in us.

God can do for you according as he has already been doing in you who are children of God. Now let me say this.

[16:30] If we are uncertain that he can help us grasp the wonder of his love, we should stop and remind ourselves of all that he has already done. Every believer should on occasion refresh their thinking about the unbelievable blessings that they have received in salvation and the undeniable proof of his work in their lives with his transforming power.

Are you different because of the cross? That's a question to which every believer can say absolutely. And along with, yes, I am different, there should also be clear indicators of the changes that he has brought and is bringing in your life.

Genuine conversion brings change. Wouldn't you agree with that? Genuine conversion brings change. I remember talking a couple weeks ago with a young lady that actually called in here and she was doing what is often done in the springtime.

It's the time that people call in and say, I would like a church wedding. And my answer is, I am so glad you called. I am all about helping young couples develop a Christian home.

And as I then went from there, I said, so tell me about your fiancé and his love for Christ. Well, he doesn't really want a church wedding.

[17:56] Well, oh, I thought we were talking about a church wedding where two people who love Jesus want to make Jesus the center of the event. I came to find out that this dear young lady had three children by, I think, three different men.

And the one that she was living with now, she decided it was appropriate to marry. And I thought, hmm. I said, you know what? Jesus wants you to walk like a believer. And I would encourage you to do that before you decide you want to do a church wedding that says publicly, I'm all about Jesus. Does that make sense to you? Sound practical? Understandable? You see, here is Paul in Ephesians chapter 3 saying, listen.

He says, go ahead and ask. But here is the foundation upon which you're asking rests. You're asking rests upon the certainty of what you have seen him already do in your life.

And if you're sitting out here this morning and you don't see the evidence of the transforming power of the gospel at work in your life, I would encourage you to ask yourself the question, do I really have the work of God playing out in my life?

[19:12] If you're a child of God, you are different than you used to be. And that difference is one of those things that the Spirit of God leverages to encourage you to keep on asking.

Now we come to something else that I think is very, very important to recognize. In verse 21, Paul brings us to the grand conclusion to the book of Ephesians, the first three chapters.

And this is the statement that in essence we find here, our triune God is supremely important and worthy. This verse is the final note in a three-chapter discourse on the glory of God and salvation. God reveals to us in Ephesians chapter 1 that he has called us according to his purpose in the election. And in his grand purposes, he has called us for his own glory and his good.

And as it comes to a conclusion in chapter 3, it ends with this note. It says, And there are a number of important things for us to recognize in this passage.

[20:17] For one, it's really all about him. When you think about what the church is, it's really all about him. When we gather together, it's about Christ. When we leave, it's about Christ.

When we wake up in the morning, it's about Christ. When we go to sleep at night, it's about Christ. And Paul's statement here is one that declares an undeniable fact at the heart of Christian existence is the glory and the purposes of Christ.

Because God is who he is. And because of what he has done. It's understandable that all that is worthy of praise rises out of him and redounds to him.

It comes back to him. The nations may rage. The atheist may shake his fist. The tyrant may torture believers. Moslems may slaughter thousands of Christians around the world.

But understand this. At the end of the day, Christ is going to be glorified and his reign will be forever. And we are reminded of that in this passage. It says, To him be glory in the church.

[21 : 26] I want to take that central thought and expand on it and have you think with me of it just for a moment. Number one, God is the central ambition and affection of his church. I got to tell you something as I think about the church.

The church is something that is far more significant in the economy of God than many, many professing believers today recognize. What is more important?

Your job or the church of the living God? In the scriptures, it is the church. What is more important? Your child's baseball or soccer or basketball games or the church? In the economy of God and in scripture, it is the church.

What is more important? Your luxury and entertainment or indulgent or opportunity to relax. Is that of more importance or is the church more important?

[22 : 27] And I got to tell you, in the scriptures, undeniably, it is the church of the living God that is of supreme importance. And if your view of the church is something that marginalizes it to fit in only when it fits your other agenda issues, you are off base.

And someday, that will be corrected. It is the church that is supremely important in the plan of God. Now, does that say that it's wrong to go to work? No. Is it wrong for your kids to play sports? No. Is it wrong for you to have vacations? No. But when those things crowd out the supremacy of the bride of Christ, there is something wrong in your thinking.

God is to be the central ambition and the affection of the church. That's what it says there. Unto him be glory in the church. Secondly, God is the center of Christ's affection and interest.

Look at what it says there in verse 21. Unto him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Do you recognize what it's saying? That in the person and work of Christ, it is the glory of the Father that was predominant, front and center, and Christ's interest.

[23 : 52] Remember when Jesus said, I am all about, this is a summary. He says, I'm all about the glory of the Father. That's what I'm here to do. He says, all that I've ever done, all that I have done has flowed out of my desire to see that my Father is glorified.

The work that I do is all about making him look good. And I've got to tell you, if that's the way the Lord Jesus was, how should we be in our relationships and responsibilities?

As you go off to work. As you deal with people. As you interact with your neighbors. You are doing the same kind of activities that Jesus or the disciples could have been engaging in.

The question is, is really what's your motive and what's at the heart of it? Are you going through those things with an intention of seeing the Father as the one who is exalted and lifted up?

Third, I want you to recognize that God will be the center of the glory for eternity. Throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen. As he brings it to a close, he says, let me tell you something.

[24 : 59] This business of the glory of God the Father is something that is not just a momentary thing in this present life. But it will be the absolute glory and ambition and affection of eternity.

What is it going to be like to be in heaven and have God the absolute center of every one of my ambitions and your ambitions, of every one of my thoughts and your thoughts?

It is going to be unbelievably delightful. Now stop and think with me. If that's how it will be in the future, it will be that way because it is right and it is true and it is noble and it is good.

And if it is that way in the future because of the character and worth of God, it is right for us to bend our hearts towards that now. Does that make sense?

I don't want people having culture shock when they arrive in heaven. Oh, what am I doing here? I don't know about this God thing.

[26 : 05] I was all about T-ball and jet skis and Angry Birds. You know, I mean, that's where I was. God, I'm not sure this is going to work.

So let me ask you this question as you come to a close with me. I just recognize here, how often do you find yourself asking whether your behavior and your affections reflect favorably on the God that you profess to worship and adore?

I think that's a fair question. And, you know, I have to deal with attitudes. How many of you have to deal with attitudes? Anybody else here besides me? Attitudes? And I have to deal with the private thoughts that I have.

One of the nice things about my private thoughts is most of the time anybody but my wife doesn't know what's going on. And she looks at me and says, what are you thinking? And I normally say, well, nothing. She says, that's not true.

That's always uncomfortable for me. You know, but here's my question. How often do you find yourself caught up in thinking about the glory and the supremacy of Christ, the glory of the Father, and saying, man, the thing I want is for him to look good and for him to be the one that receives the pleasure and prize from my thoughts and behaviors?

[27 : 23] I found myself thinking the other day about one of the old songs that occasionally we've sung. When morning gilds the skies. How many of you know the rest of it? My heart awakening cries.

What? May Jesus Christ be praised. When I wake up in the morning, if this verse 21 is affecting the way I think, my thought is, all right, Lord, today's your day.

Today is the day that I want you to be the one who receives glory. If you awake in the morning and things from the very get-go don't go your way, guess who really is in control of the details?

How many of you realize it's not you, it's Christ? And the way we respond when things don't go our way really indicates who we think, follow me here, should be in control.

And so I want you to think with me this morning of how this prayer comes to a close.

[28 : 31] Paul says, listen, I want you to love Christ. No, I want you to understand the love of Christ. And I want you to have the boldness to ask him to help you.

Why? Because he deserves glory. He deserves glory. And so when you're sitting here this morning, let me encourage you to recognize that you are here in one of two conditions.

You're here as a person who knows Christ. And you have, through the power of the Spirit of God, had your sins forgiven. And you have been given an eternal destiny that does not change.

Isn't that great? And you are loved unconditionally by the Father. My question to you is this, is are you growing in your affection for Christ through your understanding of his love?

And is that driving you towards a desire to obey him or please him? It might be that you're here today and you do not know Christ. And beloved, I would appeal to you this morning, if you are here and you do not know Christ, and you do not see the evidence of the work of the Spirit of God in your life, I would plead with you now.

[29 : 43] Now is the time of repentance. Now is the time of crying out to God and saying, God, there's something amiss. I desperately need your work to change my heart.

I can't do it myself. I want to be a person who moves from being all about me to being a person who's all about you. I need your help. Let's close in prayer as we come to a close.

And I want you to bow your heads with me and just ask God to apply the word practically to your life as John comes to lead us in our singing. Father God, this morning we are thankful for the encouragement that we can pray and ask.

And our desire is that we would understand the love of Christ, that we would be filled with the fullness of God. I pray for those who are here today that are believers, whose lives have been drawn away to discontentment and discouragement and brokenness, that this morning your spirit and your spirit alone will be the one who will refresh and lift them up and draw them back.

I pray for those who are here today that do not know Christ, that this morning your spirit would convict them of the hopelessness of their sin and they would find complete forgiveness in the Lord Jesus.

[30 : 59] We ask this in your precious name. Amen. Amen. Let's pray. Amen.