

"Power of Attorney" Ephesians 1:18-23

INTRODUCTION

I have here what is called a "power of attorney." A power of attorney involves a principal-agent relationship. In this relationship, the principal gives to the agent the legal power that he, the principal, has over his money, property, and business. In this one, for instance, the principal gives the agent the power *"to do any and every act which I (the principal) might personally do."* Thus, the agent can withdraw all the money out of the principal's savings account, sell his home, sign his tax returns, and much more.

That helps explain, by way of analogy, the passage I read, Ephesians 1:18-23. This passage teaches that God gives us, as a church, a spiritual power of attorney and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

GOD'S POWER

Look first of all at verse 19 and the words *"the strength of His might."* That refers to the power of God. Let me ask you, how much power does God have? It's "all" power. He is, as we say it, omnipotent.

Some years ago, several people from my home church prayed and asked God to heal a woman who was filled with cancer, who was only days from death. He responded and healed her immediately, in their very presence. She went on to live for 25 years after that.

I make two observations. First, as Jeremiah 32:17 reveals, nothing is difficult for God. Healing that cancer was as easy for Him as lifting this microphone is for me. Second, He had no less power after He healed her than He did before. His power is limitless. Those two observations make it clear. God is omnipotent or all-powerful.

Now, in verses 18 and 19, Paul prays that the Christians to whom he writes will know three things. One of those, in verse 19, is *"the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."* That prayer implies this. God is all-powerful and makes His power available to His people right now, in this life on earth. Or to use the analogy that

I began the sermon with, He gives His people a spiritual power of attorney. He, the principal, give us, His agents in the world, His power. According to verse 20 in fact, it's the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Wow, what a remarkable thing that is!

The first Friends, from 1652 to 1691, understood that as well as anyone did. That's because they accessed it. Our nickname itself, Quakers, is a testimony of that. One of the first Friends, Robert Barclay, explained its derivation. He wrote that Friends quaked under the power of God and as a result, their enemies began calling them Quakers. In his journal, the first Friend, George Fox, wrote about that: *"And it was so; for the Lord's power began to shake them . . . and a great power and work of God there was amongst people to the astonishment of both people and priests."*

The first Friends believed in and accessed the power of God. And so should we because it's Biblical, as you can see here in verses 19-20.

THE PRODUCT OF GOD'S POWER

Notice the result if we do in verses 22-23. The church becomes *"the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* I call that "the product of God's power." The product of God's power believed in and accessed is that the church becomes the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The Greek word translated "church" in the New Testament and here is "ecclesia." It refers to a local assembly or congregation of disciples of Jesus. That includes Prince of Peace Lutheran, New Life Assembly, and Bethel Friends. Our congregation is one of the churches of which Paul writes. So, I'm going to explain what he says as it relates to us.

He tells us in verses 20-22 that Father God raised Jesus from the dead and made Him Lord over all things including Bethel Friends. He is in fact the "head" of Bethel Friends, verse 22. He is the head and we are His body that He leads. I don't run this church. Alan Huff, the presiding elder of the congregation, doesn't run it. The Administrative Council doesn't run it. Jesus does. He's the boss, to whom we look in everything

that we decide and do. He is the head and we are His body.

And as His body, we are *"the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* That is an incredible statement to which we need to give some thought. It tells us two things. First, Jesus fills all in all. According to the Tyndale commentary on Ephesians, that means that He *"is the full expression of the Godhead."* He is the fullness of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in other words. That statement tells us a second thing. We, as a congregation, are the fullness of Jesus.

Now let's put both of those two things together. Jesus is the fullness of the Father and Holy Spirit. We, as a congregation, are the fullness of Jesus. Using basic logic, that means that we are the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That is the astonishing product of God's power. If we believe in and access His power that He makes available to us, we become the fullness of Him.

That is a spectacular truth, the practical implications of which I want to explain. Bethel Friends is to be the fullness of God in two ways.

THE FULLNESS OF COMMUNITY

The first way is in community. Several Christians and I were having a conversation one time. One asked as we did why God created human beings. Another answered, *"Because He needed someone to love."* But that isn't so. God didn't need anyone to love. Dallas Willard explains it so well. He writes that the Trinity is *"a self-sufficing community of unspeakably magnificent personal beings of boundless love, knowledge, and power."* He's right. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have, from all of eternity, loved each other with a limitless love – that is wholly satisfying.

Pardon a quote so soon after another but it's a good one. Neil Platinga describes the wholly satisfying love and life within the Trinity this way: *"At the center of the universe, self-giving love is the dynamic currency of the Trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, defer to each*

other. Each person, so to speak, makes room for the other two.

That is what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do. They exalt, commune with, defer to, and make room for each other.

And so should we. In John 17:21, Jesus prayed and asked Father God for us, that we *"may all be one; even as you Father, are in Me and I in you."* Jesus wants Bethel Friends to have the same community of love that the Father, Holy Spirit, and He have. He wants you and I to love each other like They love each other. And that's the first way that we are the fullness of God - by having that kind of community.

That is obviously a supernatural thing. It's possible, therefore, only in a church and only in one that is accessing the power of God. So let's access the power of God. We do that in two ways.

First, we commit ourselves to spiritual formation. Congregational love depends on the love of the individuals that make it up. That love is, according to Galatians 5:22, a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It's something that He produces in us, as we do certain things with our mind and body. So we need to discover and do those things. We will offer a discipleship course in spiritual formation in 2007 that will assist you with that.

But there's a second thing that we can do in the meantime. We can have the purposeful and shared intention of living out 1 Corinthians 13. That chapter defines in detail the agape love that the Holy Spirit produces. I gave a you list one time of the 15 things that agape love does and their definitions. I give it again on the round table in the narthex. Suppose that everyone in our homes and church learned those 15 things. Also suppose that they then purposefully intended to do them, even with some imperfection. What would the result be?

One of the 15 things, for instance, is that love bears all things. That means that it's absorbs insults and injuries without getting angry or depressed. In my view, one of the most destructive things in homes and churches is all the pettiness there. It's people getting so bent out of shape over slights, put downs, or wrongs, big and small. But imagine homes or churches in which people purposefully intend to bear all things,

to absorb insults and injuries, even big ones, without getting angry or depressed. Even if they did that imperfectly, life in those homes and churches would become incalculably better. So, let's learn those 15 things in 1 Corinthians 13 and purposefully intend to do them.

That then is the first way that Bethel Friends is to be the fullness of God. We are to be the fullness of Him in community.

THE FULLNESS OF MINISTRY

The second way is in ministry.

Stop for a moment and think about the three-year earthly ministry of Jesus. The gospels record just some of the extraordinary things that He did. Let me ask you a question about that. How did He do those things? Acts 10:38 tells us. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's how Jesus ministered and we, as His followers, can too. The Holy Spirit empowers us just as He did Him and Paul tells us specifically how He does in 1 Corinthians 12:6-7. He gives us spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are special abilities that the Holy Spirit produces in us. He produces them in us and then guides, empowers, and enhances our use of them. There are at least 27 gifts and probably more. I've listed those on the backside of the 1 Corinthians 13 sheet in the narthex.

Now, I believe that the Holy Spirit gave Jesus each and every one of those gifts. He was fully gifted in other words, which enabled Him to do the extraordinary things that He did. But He is the only one who ever has been. No person ever had, has, or will have all the gifts.

But all of us, according to 1 Corinthians 12:7, have at least one and probably more than one. Most of us have a "gift-mix" in fact. Certain gifts go together and the Holy Spirit usually gives them in combination to certain Christians. I think I have the gift-mix of pastoring and teaching, for instance. Anyway, the point is that all of us are gifted.

That is an exciting prospect, the result of which John 14:12 reveals to us. In that verse Jesus says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater*

works than these he will do; because I go to the Father." That is the result of the Holy Spirit gifting us. We can do all the works that Jesus did. We can minister to God and man like He did.

When I say "we," I don't mean as individuals. I mean as a congregation. Yes, it's true. Not one of us has all of the spiritual gifts that He had. But all of us, as a congregation, do. That means that our congregation can minister to God and man just as powerfully as He did.

But we can do that only if all of us are using our spiritual gifts. And that is our call today, to use the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us. There are three things that we need to do to answer that call.

First, study the spiritual gifts. One of the discipleship courses that we will be offering you is titled *Ambassadorship*. That course will help you do that. We also have books on spiritual gifts in our church library.

Second, discover your gifts. Determining what your natural abilities are and what you enjoy doing is helpful. Also pray. Father God won't play games with you in regard to your spiritual gifts. He won't frustrate you by hiding them from you. Ask Him what they are and He'll tell you.

Third and finally, decide to use your gifts in ministry. God does not give gifts that He does not call us to use. And He does not call us to do things without gifting us for them. So once you discover your gifts, you'll know what your calling or ministry is. At that point, make and carry out the decision to use those gifts for that calling or ministry.

If you and I on the whole do that, Bethel Friends will become the fullness of God in ministry.

CONCLUSION

What I've shared today gives us a vision for our congregation, for Bethel Friends. That vision isn't to be an institution that exists to perpetuate itself. It's to be an organism instead that is literally the fullness of God in community and ministry. He has given us a spiritual power of attorney. Let's believe in and use it. We'll fulfill that grand and glorious destiny that He has for us as a church if we do.