

Living God's Plan

"Yes, He can!"

Intro: All of us who watched the political rallies of the 2008 election can surely remember the chant that united the followers of Barak Obama. It was bannered above virtually every speech and its repetition recharged the enthusiasm of those who wanted to put him into the White House. "Yes, we can! Yes, we can!"

All of us need to know that what we've put our hand to, we can also achieve. We all need that "can do" spirit in whatever we're trying. And we need that kind of assurance in living God's plan. Will we ever commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the plan of God, if we are not sure that we can succeed? I think not; but Paul in this paragraph will give us encouragement to believe it is possible to be all that God's purposed. However, as we are about to see, His banner does not say, "Yes, we can!" Instead it says, "Yes, He can!"

Let's hear once more Paul's encouraging words:

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceeding 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. (Eph. 3:14-21)

If you've been coming every Sunday, hopefully you have a much clearer picture of how Paul approaches the plan of God. He shows us first that we must understand God's purpose; second he shows us that we must experience God's power. Interestingly Paul both begins and ends the section with a prayer for the Ephesians that they might know and experience the power of God so that His plan will be achieved in their lives.

"Yes, He can" when we pray in faith.

Paul shows us first that achieving the life God purposes for us comes through prayer to the Father.

Paul humbled himself (bowing my knees) before the Father (the one from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name, i.e. the Father of all fathers.)

He prayed that God would grant four blessings to the Ephesians "according to the riches of His glory," i.e. in a measure commensurate with the greatness of God's glory.)

How marvelous that God does not give the Spirit's power to us "out of His riches" but "according to"—which is a far greater thing. If I am a billionaire and I give you ten dollars, I have given you out of my riches; but if I give you a million dollars, I have given to you according to my riches. The first is a portion; the second is a proportion. (Wiersbe, Be Rich)

We need to pray that we may strengthen through the Spirit

to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;
Paul has already mentioned to the Ephesians how that they had been "sealed with Spirit" after their baptism and how that He was revealing God's message to the church. Just as in the first creation God's Spirit hovered over the waters and brought the creation out of them in fulfillment of His word; so His Spirit now works in us to make us a new creation and to strengthen us in fulfillment of His word.

We need to pray that we may be indwelt by Christ

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;
Paul shows us that in those Spirit strengthens the image of Christ is formed. As we accept His message in faith, we are transformed by that message to become like Jesus!

We need to pray that we may be rooted and grounded in love

and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
And in the one the Spirit strengthens and in whom Christ dwells there will be a "love" of God which anchors and establishes us like a mighty tree that will withstand the winds of false doctrine and temptation.

We need to pray that we may comprehend the love of Christ

may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,
And in the one the Spirit strengthens and in whom Christ dwells and in whom is found the love that anchors, there will be an increasing understanding of God and His love.
Paul speaks paradoxically. We will grow in knowledge, but never fully attain or exhaust the knowledge of the love of Christ.

We need to pray that we may be filled with the fullness of God

that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.
That is ultimate objective of it all. We live in a world of empty people; but Paul offers the possibility of something great! That we can be filled with every spiritual blessing which God planned for us!

Wow, Paul prays big prayers! He thinks big thoughts for God's people! But can we really be all that!?

"Yes, He can," because His power is great!

Paul follows his prayer of petition with a prayer of praise.

He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

God has the power to do what Paul prays for. He has spent two chapters describing it (power in the Savior, power in the sinner, power to reconcile and unite Jew and Gentile)

We cannot conceive what God can do with us when we let him have control!

He is able to bring glory to Himself through us.

When we become what God wants us to be we become a means by which God is glorified!

God is glorified in the Son through His redemptive work.

God is glorified in the saints when they are filled with God's fulness.

This glory is to be given to God as long as man lives on earth (to all generations) and then forever and ever.

Conclusion: What does it all mean? It means that all that God planned for us, He helps us achieve through faith in Him. Each of us individually and all of us together become a display to heavenly beings of the manifold wisdom of God.

Paul begins by praying that we may know; he ends by praying that we may be; but what Paul makes clear is that this life is not merely the result of human effort. Instead it is a life in which God works in us. Can we live a life of exceptional spirituality? Can we live above the mundane concerns of this world? Paul declares God's emphatic "yes" to us. "Yes, we can!" because "Yes, He can!"

(This lesson was part of a year-long series on the Epistle to the Ephesians called "Living God's Plan." I'd be glad to share other lessons in the series if you are interested—jdf.)