

Prayer for Spiritual Insight

Ephesians 1:15-23

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INTRODUCTION

As we begin our section and Ephesians this evening, Paul has just completed an incredible song of celebration reminding us of what God has done, what we have because of what God has done and what comes from it.

God has blessed us, chosen us, and predestined us.

Because of that we have redemption, revelation, and an eternal inheritance.

And what comes from all this? We have believed and have been sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit.

And this is what Paul looks back on at the beginning of our text.

But what does the beginning of this chapter have to do with Paul's prayer for them?

We must know and understand our "position", that is, who we are in Christ.

In many aspects of our lives, we need to understand who we are and where we fit in if we are going to take our proper place.

I am the Elder in charge of Adult Bible Education and Biblical Counseling here at Clearcreek Chapel.

- I am not the elder in charge of Children. While I may have experience and opinions regarding Children's ministry, it is not my position to make and carry out decisions.
- I am not the elder in charge of stewardship. While I may have experience and opinions regarding finances, it is not my position to make and carry out decisions.
- I played competitive volleyball for many years. While I understood the principles of being a setter, and while I had some limited skill in that area, that was not my position.

On the topic of obedience, John MacArthur writes, "Now this is just part of it in anything you do, you're given an assignment, the parameters are defined and you're asked to fulfill those. Number one you must hear the definition of it, number two you must understand it, then you can do it. But you can't do it without the first two. The same thing is true with a Christian, you can't just try to get people to behave in a certain manner unless they understand the parameters and definition of what it is that they're asked to do."

And this is why we must understand who we are in Christ first. It is the foundation that gives us the ability to please him. And that is our goal in life, "Whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him (2 Corinthians 5:9).

PAUSE

Paul begins right away praising God for their saving faith. It is something to praise God for because as Paul reminds us in chapter 2, it is salvation that is not of their own works, or their own hand, and there is no room for boasting. And then he goes on in verse 15 to praise God for their practical faith, their love toward all the saints.

And this type of love is worth commending because, as the clergyman Jonathan Swift once said, "We sometimes have just enough religion to make us hate but not enough to make us love one another."

John Calvin, commenting on this passage, observed here that the faith and love in this verse sums up the whole perfection of Christians. In other words, when you have faith and love paired together you have something incredible for which to praise God.

This is the reason Paul prayed for this church. He looks back to the faith that God has supplied, and looks forward to the faith that they display. The Ephesians were obedient.

The Christian life requires faith in God at its beginning and through its whole existence while on earth. A life pleasing to God believes in God.

Christian obedience is how believing in God expresses itself. Where faith in God is growing, obedience to God will grow. We express our love for one another. In fact, from chapter 3 to the end of Ephesians, most commands are relational.

And Paul is so thankful for them. His thanksgiving goes on and on and on. And this is what we have learned about Paul's character and posture repeatedly from his letters. In everything he gives thanks. Paul lives a life of gratitude for what Christ has done for him and all the saints. And it is not a burden for Paul to remind us over and over again to be thankful.

And then midsentence, if you will, Paul defines two specific things in which he prays for the Ephesians.

1. He prays that they would know God better.
2. He prays that they would know truth clearly.

The grace of the Holy Spirit enables us to know God and his word. It is the Spirit who gave the word. It is the spirit who grants us wisdom as we grow in knowing God.

The knowledge of God referred to in verse 17 is deep and intimate.
I know some things about George Washington.
I know some things about Napoleon.

But this is not what Paul is referring to here. The word for knowledge here is the same word that God uses in Genesis when he talks about Adam knowing his wife Eve. There is a deep intimacy involved in this knowledge.

I know some things about Terry Engle. In fact, I have shared meals with Terry Engle. I have been to Terry Engle's home. We have a mutual friend.

But my knowledge of Terry Engle, while much greater than my knowledge of George Washington, does not compare with the knowledge I have of Jayne.

There are times when I can finish her sentences. I know when she is sad, or concerned, or pensive. I know the foods she likes to eat, the places she likes to go, and the proper temperature to set the thermostat. This is the intimate knowledge that Paul desires that we have with the father.

It is this type of knowledge that is critical for those who claim to follow Christ. It is the lack of this knowledge that Jesus warns of in Matthew 7:22 when he says, "Many will say to me in that day Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles. I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers."

And so I ask the question this evening,

- Do you really know Christ?
- Are you really his?
- Do you really know Christ the way that Paul is praying for the Ephesians?

And once we have a more intimate knowledge of Christ, we begin to develop a better vision of spiritual things.

Paul's prayer for this church has become my prayer for our church.

So what does this look like in our lives? We see the answer to that in verses 18 through 23.

First we must understand that we cannot live what we do not know. As we think about what God has done for us in verses 3-14, and we look ahead to the obedience he describes in chapters 3 through 6, we cannot function on principles we don't know.

Without a proper understanding of verses 18-19, we will live in ignorance and frustration. Why? Because we will rely on our own opinions of what righteousness looks like instead of the truth.

We will be wrong, living lives of legalism or licentiousness, probably both.

It is a personal enlightenment. God graces us with the ability to actually see what we are learning. It is a spiritual "lightbulb" moment when we understand what the word of God is actually saying.

This is not an intellectual knowledge. This is not the result of long hard study. This is not the result of Bible College or seminary. This doesn't necessarily equate to the size of your library.

No, this is a grace and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

"God has revealed to us the spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the

Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

We look toward the future. We will grow in understanding the wonderful future God has promised to those who believe. This hope, the hope of glory, is what God called us to in our salvation. So we live today, right now, in view of God’s promises about the future.

We will begin to understand the incredible greatness of God’s power. Look at verses 19-23.

Paul has prayed that his readers might know the hope to which God has called them and how greatly prized they are as his treasured possession. Now in this somewhat climactic request, the focus of Paul’s prayer is upon the amazing power of God working on behalf of those whom he is called.

Howard Hendricks once told the story, “Just before World War II in the town of Itasca, Texas, a school fire took the lives of 263 children. There was scarcely a family in town that was not touched by this horrifying tragedy. After the war, the town built a new school, which featured what was called “the finest sprinkler system in the world.” The town was very proud of their new school. Honor students were selected to guide citizens and visitors on tours of the new facility to show them the finest, most advanced sprinkler system technology. Never again would a fire disaster happen.

Many years later, the town made progress and grew. It was necessary to enlarge the school - and in adding the new wing, it was discovered that the sprinkler system had never been connected.”

This describes many Christian’s lives because they don’t understand the power of God and its grace in their life.

This idea of God’s power is introduced in a remarkable way. First he uses the term immeasurable greatness to describe this power. And then Paul uses an additional phrase with three synonymous terms to really drive home his point, “the working of his great might.”

The supreme demonstration of God’s power took place in his raising Christ from the dead and exalting him to a position of authority in heaven above all hostile spiritual powers.

- When we think about the love of God, we think of the cross.
- When we think about the power of God, we think of the resurrection. And this is why Paul uses the resurrection to describe the incredible power of God.

The power of God is first evident in our salvation, “for I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation.”

Often people sit in a church and listen to the gospel preached week after week, and don’t believe it is possible, or applicable to their lives.

They think,

- if you only knew the sin in my life
- if you only understood the corruption in my heart
- if you only understood the horrible things that I had done

But God says to us, that the power that raised Jesus from the dead saves us from our sin.

But it's not only the power to save, it's the power to live a transformed life. That is the power of the resurrection. We have the power to lead a godly life because of this power. This is Romans chapter 6, "that we may walk in newness of life."

And Paul prays that we might understand and appropriate that power. And the problem is that some of us never "hook up".

And so when Paul prays in verse 18 that the eyes of your hearts might be enlightened, part of what he is focusing on is that we might understand the power of God.

We see in verses 20 and 21 that this incredible power exalted Christ. (READ 20-21).

Picture this in your mind's eye.

- Jesus is crucified.
- Three days later he bursts forth from the grave.
- He spends the next 40 days walking the earth, appearing to different groups, teaching the word, helping them understand.
- He gathers his disciples in Bethany and instructs them to stay there.
- He tells them that they will receive the Holy Spirit and they will receive through the Holy Spirit great power.
- He then ascends to heaven where he is exalted and glorified. He ascends to the right hand in the heavenly places. What a glorious truth.

And this is what makes Paul and our praying possible.

- The expression of God's power.
- The ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven.
- And the extent of God's sovereignty, "and he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

- Are you gripped more and more by the centrality of Christ for all of life?
- Are you beginning to understand the power, supremacy, sovereignty, and exultation of Jesus Christ?
- For if Christ is not exalted, then why should we submit to him?

You see, God has given us the Holy Spirit with power, so that we may believe and know God in a most intimate way that leads us to holiness and godly living.

CONCLUSION

Does this prayer describe your life?

Do you truly understand the truths of God's Word?

Or is your relationship with Jesus Christ the same as your relationship with George Washington?

These are legitimate questions for the believer this evening. Because:

- Our obedience is the **result** of genuine belief. We live by faith in what we know is true.
- Our obedience is an **expression** of our love for Christ. We obey because we love the Lord and desire to please him and to serve others.
- And because of our **intimate relationship** with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we obey with increasing expectation of what lies ahead.

Do you understand that the power that raised Jesus from the grave is available to you? Is it evident in your life? Or are you like a sprinkler system that has never been hooked up?

May God be glorified in our lives. May we recognize the power for life that has been made available to us. And may God be glorified in all of this as people see our good works and glorify the father in heaven.