

An Impetus for Prayer

Ephesians 1.15-16

I have no problem eating regular meals. I need little encouragement to remember to eat. Running is different. It's not that I don't enjoy it. And I understand that it is important to keep it up to stay healthy. But it's too easy to allow running to get crowded out of the schedule.

I find that prayer is more like running for me than eating. I'm not talking about casual prayers that arise throughout the course of the day. I'm referring more to the labor of intercession, praying regularly for the needs that surround me in my life, my family, my church, my friends, and my society and world in general. It's not that I don't enjoy praying, because I do. It's not that I don't see the importance of praying. Indeed, I'm convinced that it is absolutely vital. But I still find the need for discipline and encouragement.

Thankfully, God knows our weakness. God doesn't just frown upon us and shake his head in disgust. He helps us in our weakness. God knows that we will struggle to depend on him in prayer. He knows that we will tend to be self-reliant, and thus forgo praying. Therefore, he gives us encouragements to pray. In our text, Paul points to some Divine encouragement to pray for the church in Ephesus.

Paul points to God's pleasure in blessing His people as an impetus to pray for them. **We also have strong encouragement to pray for each other as we see the evidence of God's pleasure to bless His people.**

Define "bless" in this context. Not prosperity gospel where blessings focus on the gifts of God, but the gospel that focuses on God as the supreme gift. When we see God giving Himself to His people, weaning them off of this world, and fostering their enjoyment of His excellencies, then we see God's blessings on His people, and we are reminded and motivated to pray for every grace to increase in them.

We are moved to pray by God's desire to bless His people as evidenced by God's Word.

"For this reason" refers to the previous section (vv. 3-14). The pleasure of God to bless and the exposition of God's blessings in these verses encourage our thanksgiving and petitions for fellow believers.

In a firefight, the assistant gunner high crawling over to his squad leader and asking for another bandolier of 7.26. Same scenario, except this time he asks for a cookie bar.

John 14.13-14 "Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."

Luke 12.32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

God has expressed His desire and intention to bless us. Prayer is a means that God has ordained for accomplishing His purposes. So be bold in seeking God's blessings for His people.

Notice that God has blessed us “for His glory.” When we know that God’s “chief end” is to glorify God and enjoy Himself forever, then we are made bold to pray for those things that bring Him glory, such as the Spiritual blessing of His people, the fruitful lives of the saints. Example, Moses’ intercession for Israel.

The more you learn of God’s good purposes for His people, the more confident you will be in intercession. Therefore, be diligent to learn what God has promised. When you know His promises, you’ll have your prayers.

First, we are moved to pray by God’s desire to bless His people as evidenced by God’s Word. Secondly,

We are moved to pray by God’s desire to bless His people as evidenced by faith in Jesus.

“Because I have heard of your faith” is probably an over-translation. It is more likely a temporal adverbial phrase, which is best translated, “when I heard of your faith.” But the ESV is correct to identify it as a cause or ground of Paul’s thanksgiving and petition on their behalf. When he heard the report of their faith in the Lord Jesus, he was further encouraged to give thanks and pray for them. The reason for this is plain. Paul, unlike so many in the church today, understood faith as a gift from God, not as something that man works up in himself. Faith is a gift that comes down from heaven, not a virtue that is brought up from the human heart. That this was a conviction in Paul’s theology is clear from the fact that he never defends or even expounds on the subject, he seems to simply assume it. For example, in Ephesians 2.8 he says “it is the gift of God.” No argument, just a statement of fact. He says to the Philippians that “it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake” (Phil 1.29). Paul assumes that the Philippians already know that they have been granted faith as a gift. What he wants them to marvel at is that they have also received suffering for Christ as a gift. So, when Paul receives a report that reminds him of the lively faith of the Ephesian Christians, he sees the evidence of God’s grace in their lives, and is made bold to ask for God to bestow His rich blessings on them even further.

Ever since I was a child I always appreciated people with drawing abilities. Often, when I discovered that someone possessed skill for drawing, I would commission them for some personal project where they could display their skill for my enjoyment. When we see the evidence of faith in a person’s life, we see the hand of God sculpting something marvelous. It should move us to say, “God, keep going, we see the broad contours of Your design, but keep going that we might see the facial features more distinctly. Keep the hammer and chisel going that we might see the muscle tone in the arms and the delicate creases in the fingers. Show us more of your wisdom.

John 15.1-2, 8 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.”

It is right and good that we should pray, “Father, finish the work that you have begun in this brother’s live—in this sister’s life. Bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Oh glorious Vinedresser, show

us what great and abundant clusters of fruit You can produce through these poor branches that have been grafted into Your Son.”

An evidence of God’s blessing is perseverance in faith.

Do you have a faith that can be reported? Their faith was evident. Paul received a report about it. Is your faith an impetus for prayer?

We are moved to pray for each other by God’s desire to bless His people as evidenced by God’s Word, as evidenced by faith in Jesus, and thirdly,

We are moved to pray by God’s desire to bless His people as evidenced by love toward the saints.

Love is the fruit of the Spirit that most characterizes the Christian. Jesus said, “By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.” So Paul can say, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” (Gal 5.6). Faith shows its genuineness and liveliness in love—and distinctively love toward the saints. Jesus was clear that the world loves its own. Since Jesus was not from the world, the world did not love Jesus. Since the disciples of Jesus are not of this world, Jesus warned us, neither would the world love us. So, when we love the saints—our fellow Christians—we show that we are not of the world, but that we are born of God. We show evidence of saving faith by love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When a lion eats meat we aren’t surprised. If it ate lettuce we would sit up and take notice. Isaiah says that in the eschaton, the wolf will lie down with the lamb. When a sinful human being starts loving the holy people of God and wants to spend time in the company of the redeemed and gives of himself for the love of his brother, then we sit up and take notice. This is against nature. This is a work of grace.

This love that Christians have for each other is not like the love of the world, it is like the love of God. It is the loyal, faithful love of a covenant bond. In our culture, love is often sentimental soup. Even deeds of charity are often done with more thought to how it makes me feel inside, rather than with any real consideration for the person we’re supposedly helping. It’s like the parents who can’t say “no” to their children, lest the children not “like” them. So, they’ll give her all the candy she wants, even if all of her teeth are falling out. Is that love? No, that’s selfishness, masquerading as love. Christian love seeks the welfare of the other person’s soul. Christian love rejoices in righteousness, and weeps over sin in a believer’s life. Christian love is not content to merely put a smile on someone’s face; it aims to see Christ formed in the believer’s heart. Christian love does not paste over poverty by throwing money at poor brothers and sisters; it seeks to do the dirty and often offensive work of reorienting the heart around kingdom priorities. Christian love does not proffer excuses for godless conduct, but graciously comes alongside the erring brother or sister to strengthen the arms for battle against sin and the devil. Christian love is not in word only, but as John says in 1 John 3.18, “in deed and in truth.” Now, this Christian love is not something that can come from within the Christian. If you are doing good “out of the goodness of your heart” it is not Christian love. To quote John again, “If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4.12-13). It is God’s love perfected in us, or it is no Christian love at

all. It is the Holy Spirit at work in us, or we are not abiding in Him, but we are abiding in the world and in our flesh. Paul says, “the fruit of the Spirit is love.” This is not the “goodness of my heart,” but the goodness of God being produced in me by the Spirit.

So when Paul hears of their love toward all the saints, he sees the evidence of God’s blessing on them, and is encouraged to pray.

Sometimes we grow relaxed when we see someone’s faith waxing strong. But for Paul, this evidence of God’s grace moved Him to pray for the saints. When a cancer patient shows remarkable progress, you don’t stop treatments. You are encouraged that the treatments are working and you keep them up, even if they make the person sick and tired. You only stop the treatment when the cancer is undetected. The most sterling saint you see on this side of glory is still a sinner in need of grace. Let the evidence of grace be a motivation for you to pray. Do not cease to pray.