

A Prayer for the Ephesians – Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul prays that the Ephesians will grow in the knowledge of God in every way
2. aim – to cause us to seek to know God, to understand him and to be known by him in every way
3. passage – Ephesians 1:15-22

b. outline

1. The Reason for the Prayer (Ephesians 1:15-16a)
2. The Reality of the Prayer (Ephesians 1:16b-18a)
3. The Results of the Prayer (Ephesians 1:18b-22)

c. opening

1. a **question** at the heart of this passage
 - a. if God said that he would grant you any *one* request, what would you ask for?
 1. no need to “shout out your answer” – we will not debate the relative merits of the answers
 2. remember: the very *definition* of judgment is for God to give you what you want!
 - b. **rephrasing**: if God said that he would grant you any one request for *Grace Fellowship Baptist Church*, what would you ask for?
 1. it is likely that the *kind* of request you made in each of the two scenarios is different:
 - a. in the first case, it is likely that you thought of something *personal* – something for *you*
 - b. in the second case, it is likely that you thought of something more *magnanimous* – for others
 - c. **revealed**: our natural inclination, even as believers, is to think of ourselves first
 2. it is likely that the *substance* of the requests made here would fall into three (3) camps:
 - a. that God would increase the *size* of the church, bringing more people to the church
 - b. that God would increase the *budget* of the church, allowing for more ministries and programs
 - c. that God would increase the number of people *involved* (or ministering) in the church
 - d. **i.e.** the three (3) most popular answers among church-going Americans
 3. there is nothing *inherently* wrong with these types of requests (**i.e.** with good motive):
 - a. **principle #1: a healthy church is a growing church!**
 1. more people = more worship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, conversions, etc.
 2. more money = more obedience, commitment, sacrifice, service, etc.
 3. more involvement = more challenge, growth, maturity, opportunities, etc.
 - b. **principle #2: never let the good crowd out the best! (EBC 1980)**
 - c. **rephrasing**: what would the *Apostle Paul* pray for GFBC (and its people)?
 1. **IOW**: if all of these things are “good” for the church, what would be the “best” request for her?
 2. Paul will give us in **Ephesians 1:15-23** the answer to that question – Paul will tell us (from his vantage point) what is the *best* thing God could grant to *any* church
2. a **pattern** at the heart of this passage
 - a. like *most* (9/13) of Paul’s letters, he will indicate (as a part of his greeting):
 1. most = Romans, 1 Cor., Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thess., 2 Timothy, Philemon
 2. specifically, that he *remembers* them in prayer, (**i.e.** that he regularly prays for them) and
 3. that he is *grateful* for them and for their faithfulness to the gospel (**i.e.** who they are *to him*)
 - b. here, as Paul languishes under house arrest, his prayer is more *heightened* in specificity
 1. because, **the prospect of death sharpens the focus of the mind** – in the face of (possible) death, eternal things become more important while most things trivial fade into obscurity
 2. therefore, what Paul prays for here takes on a special significance *to the church*
3. a **reason** at the heart of this passage
 - a. or, *why* does Paul pray as he does for the church at *Ephesus*?
 - b. and, *how* does Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians apply to us in the church *today*?
4. the **structure** at the heart of this passage
 1. like **vv. 3-14, vv. 15-23** are a single sentence in the Greek – a singular “thought” occupies each
 - a. in **vv. 3-14**, the outworkings (or blessings) of the divine decree of the Father *in general*
 - b. in **vv. 15-23**, the effects (or realities) of the divine decree of the Father *in the Ephesians*
 2. like the first sentence, the second has a visible structure of thought (point-to-point):
 - a. the reason **why** Paul prays → the substance of his prayer → the results he knows will come

I. The Reason for the Prayer (Ephesians 1:15-16a)

Content

a. the reason *given* (v. 15)

1. “for this reason” – a transition statement between the two sentences, moving to a point
 - a. **problem:** which words does Paul refer to with “this reason” – what reason? before or after?
 - b. most commentators suggest the words *before* this – as Paul finishes writing his sentence on the divine decree, and its utter importance to every true believer, he prays for them ...
 - c. some commentators suggest the words *after* this – “because” Paul had heard of their faith and love, and knows how important those are to being a true believer, he prays for them ...
 - d. **answer:** it is **both** – the “because I have heard ...” statement of v. 15 is actually an excellent summary of the necessary effect of the blessings outlined in vv. 3-14
 1. or, faith and love are the **visible manifestations** of the blessings of God in the elect
2. “I have heard” – the news of their condition has come to him
 - a. certainly, via messengers from Asia Minor (Tychicus? 6:21-22)
 - b. however, this statement seems odd from someone who had spent 2-3 years with them
 1. shouldn't it be “I have seen ...?” – no, because Paul has been away from Ephesus for >5 years
 2. therefore, it is likely that Paul considers himself (now) a virtual stranger to them
 - c. so, it is likely that Paul has gotten a report from the church and wishes to encourage it
3. “your faith in the Lord Jesus” – the **vertical** manifestation of being blessed by God
 - a. remember v. 13 – you heard the word truth (the gospel) and you believed the word of truth
 - b. those who are included in God's decree will manifest **radical trust** in the message of the gospel
 - c. because Paul has “heard” of their faith, he knows that they are included in the blessings of election, predestination, redemption, forgiveness, sealing, and an everlasting inheritance – it is **evidence**
4. “your love toward all the saints” – the **horizontal** manifestation of being blessed by God
 - a. note that Paul says “saints” – implying a love towards other believers (i.e. in the church)
 1. he uses “agape” – a word describing the love of God towards himself and his elect (specifically)
 2. **i.e.** a special form of love reserved specifically for those in a “common” relationship (in Christ)
 - b. **truth #1:** a love for others (particularly in the church) is a form of *faith*, but on a horizontal level
 1. to love others is (**by definition**) to invest a level of trust in them
 - a. to trust God is to love him – to love God is to trust him (that's relationship!!; Gal. 5:6)
“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”
 2. the church is a place where we love one another by *trusting* one another to worship with us, to cry (or laugh) with us, to confess sin to one another, to hold each other accountable, to teach (disciple) us, to help us raise our kids in the Lord, to counsel us, to pray for us, etc.
 - c. **truth #2:** a love for others (specifically in the church) is an essential element of being “in Christ”
 1. **question:** how long would we be friends if I told you that I love you, but despise your wife?
 - a. reality: this is how many Christians treat the church – they either claim to not need the church (as lone-ranger believers) or they “nibble” around the edges (**a fishing metaphor**)
 - b. to “nibble” at the church is to fail to commit to it – to be a perpetual “attende” and never a member, to engage only in the parts of the church that are “valuable” in a pragmatic sense, to see the church as a “secondary” priority amongst all others
 - d. **principle: a genuine vertical faith (or love) in the promises of God in Christ Jesus must manifest itself in a fully committed horizontal faith (and love) for others in Christ**
5. Paul has heard of the faith and love of the Ephesian Christians, as evidence of their inclusion in the blessings of the Father, and it is for this reason that he prays for them

b. the reason *extended* (v. 16a)

1. **question:** what should be the primary *attitude* of those who are included in the divine decree?
 - a. or, what should be our *inherent response* to an ever-increasing understanding of all that God has decreed over us, accomplished for us, and promised to us?
 - b. or, how should we respond to the fact that we (and those around us in the church) are included in the eternal plan of God where we are rescued from our state of utter rebellion against him and granted an inheritance consisting of him (in every way)?
2. **answer:** gratitude – to “give thanks”
 - a. **principle: the central attitude of the believer is one of utter and unreserved gratitude**
 - b. from a **Theology of Prayer** (GFBC Wednesday)
 1. a proper understanding of salvation *requires* us to give thanks constantly (**1 Thess. 5:16-19**)
“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
 2. authentic prayer is a constant articulation of gratitude for the salvation we have in Jesus Christ

3. Paul has heard of the faith and love of the Ephesian Christians, as evidence of their inclusion in the blessings of the Father, and it is for this reason that he is utterly grateful to God for them
- c. the reason *applied***
1. **principle: you learn a great deal about a man by the way that he prays**
 - a. Paul is convinced that the Ephesians belong to a great decree of grace and mercy, and
 - b. Paul is filled with gratitude to God for his own salvation and the salvation of all of the elect
 2. **therefore, the specific request that Paul will make for the church at Ephesus (and for us!) flows out of his absolute assurance and his attitude of gratitude – what he prays for is determined not by pragmatic need, but by these truths central to his life (stay tuned!)**