

A Prayer for the Ephesians – Part 2

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 given any one request for *Grace Fellowship Baptist Church*, what would you ask for?
 1. **principle #1: a healthy church is a growing church!**
 2. **principle #2: never let the good crowd out the best! (EBC 1980)**
 - b. so what would the *Apostle Paul* pray for GFBC (and its people)?
 1. **IOW**: given all 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. the **structure** at the heart of this passage
 - a. the reason why Paul prays
 1. Paul is convinced that the Ephesians belong to a great decree of grace and mercy, and
 2. Paul is filled with gratitude to God for his own salvation and the salvation of all of the elect
 3. 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*
 - b. (**now**) the substance (or reality) of what Paul prays
 1. **principle: you learn a great deal about a man by the way that he prays**
 2. or, the substance of a man’s prayer life will tell you of his priorities – what really matters to him
 3. or, if a healthy church is a growing church, what does Paul pray will grow in them?
 4. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians has:
 - a. a **structure** (a sense of continuity), a **source** (a Trinitarian basis), a **spirit** (a core set of priorities), and a **sight** (a laser-like focus on what really matters)

II. The Reality of the Prayer (Ephesians 1:16b-18a)

Content

a. the structure of Paul’s prayer (v. 16b)

1. “remembering you” = the *continual* nature of Paul praying for the church at Ephesus
 - a. a **continuity of practice** – Paul prays for the Ephesians because he knows that prayer is essential both to the existence and health of the church – he understands the *causal* and *existential* relationship between prayer and the church
 - b. Paul understands certain overarching principles (from our Wednesday night series on prayer)
 1. prayer = an intimate form of communication with God based on a confidence in 1) his sovereignty over all things *and* 2) his desire to relate personally with those he calls his own
 2. **a healthy N.T. church must have a vibrant private, public, and communal prayer life in order to be a worthwhile instrument in the advancement of the kingdom of Christ**
 - a. or, a congregation without a vibrant private, public, and communal prayer life, regardless of its health in other areas, will *not* be used by Christ as an instrument to advance his kingdom
 3. the statistical evidence of the lack of importance given to prayer (George Barna, 2004)

[Only 9% of] adults identified prayer as the most fulfilling spiritual activity they undertake, while Bible reading was named by 7%. Just 3% mentioned the maintenance or enjoyment of their relationship with God as their greatest source of spiritual fulfillment. The most common effort [for spiritual fulfillment] (23%) was attending church services and events. Having a better prayer life was considered by only 4% of Christians as a way to improve their spiritual make-up.

4. the anecdotal evidence of the lack of importance given to prayer (in the church today)
 - a. the disappearance of regular and formal *communal* prayer in the life of the church
 - b. the relegation of prayer to the “professionals” or to those who are “gifted” to pray
 - c. the disconnect of prayer from theology – the minimization of the interpretive lens of theology
 - c. so, Paul “remembers” the Ephesians because it is a part of his **theology** to do so
 1. only God can keep the church (existentially) and only God can use the church (causally)
 - a. the church does not exist or succeed without the direct, sovereign work of God – only God himself (within his decree) can “add to their number day by day” (**Acts 2:46**)
 2. **Paul prays regularly for the Ephesians because he knows the connection between prayer and survival – that God has ordained prayer to be part of how the church thrives**
 - a. (**ironically**) this is probably one of the bits of knowledge Paul prays for (**see below**)
- b. the source of Paul’s prayer (v. 17a)**
1. **note:** the use of the word “that” at the beginning of the verse indicates the *content* of his prayer
 2. **question:** to whom does Paul pray – to whom does he seek affirmation and acceptance?
 - a. like everything else in **Ephesians 1**, Paul (here) is genuinely **Trinitarian** in focus
 - b. he makes his requests to “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory”
 1. subordinationism (heretical) = the ancient Arian controversy that the Son and the Spirit are subordinate to (answer to) the Father in both their nature and role (**i.e.** the Father is greater)
 - a. condemned as heresy at the 1st Council of Constantinople in 381AD
 2. subordinationism (orthodox) = the belief that while the Son and the Spirit both possess the fullest nature of the Godhead (in utter equality to the Father), the Son and the Spirit *willingly accept* subordinate roles in the work of redemption, under the decree of the Father
 - a. note Paul uses “Jesus Christ” here to describe the Son – his subordinate *role* (not nature)
 - b. the **ontological** Trinity = three co-eternal, co-equal, Persons in the Godhead (nature)
 - c. the **economical** Trinity = three Persons in the Godhead each carrying out his covenantal responsibilities within the divine decree (role)
 3. so, Paul prays to the Father as the divine Person through which all requests go (in his role)
 - c. he seeks his answers from “the Spirit ...”
 1. so, Paul prays from the Spirit as the divine Person through which his answers come (in his role)
- c. the spirit of Paul’s prayer (v. 17b)**
1. **note:** the structure of the phrase – “the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him”
 - a. the *foundational* element of Paul’s request is “knowledge” (**i.e.** the others being “in” this)
 - b. the *resultant* elements of Paul’s request are “wisdom” and “revelation” (**i.e.** within “knowledge”)
 2. “knowledge” = to possess information; to learn about; to come to understand; having full discernment
 - a. a key concept in the epistles of the N.T. (**x20**) – as the *basis* of: faith, a relationship with God, an understanding of righteousness (and sin), the ability to love, how to live (walk) properly, etc.
 1. note **Ephesians 4:13** – “until we all attain to ... the knowledge of the Son of God”
 - b. it is not an understatement to say that Paul considered Christian maturity to *start* with an ever-increasing *understanding of the things of God* – who he is and what he is doing
 1. all of Paul’s letters expand on one or more aspects of God and how we are to understand him
 - a. he is not ashamed to teach theology and doctrine – he assumes them as *fundamental*
 2. all of Paul’s letters extend the concept of knowledge into the practical (**see below**)
 - a. he is not ashamed to teach obedience and perseverance – he assumes them as *essential*
 - c. **reality:** we live in an *anti-intellectual* culture, which has **bled** into the church
 1. in the culture: it’s no longer about learning and expanding understanding, but about being “entrenched” in our preconceptions and prejudices (**e.g.** Twitter rants) – we no longer value education, but prefer *indoctrination* (**e.g.** college life)
 2. in the church: it’s no longer about learning and developing understanding, but about being “entertained” in our self-focus and self-delusion (**e.g.** therapeutic) – we no longer value theology, but prefer *simplification* (**e.g.** topical vs. expository preaching)
 - d. **so, Paul prays fundamentally that the Spirit of God will fill the Ephesians with greater knowledge as the foundation of their existence and success as a church**
 3. “wisdom” = the proper use of knowledge; the ability to properly apply knowledge to a problem
 - a. **note:** it is possible to have great amounts of knowledge, and not be wise (**Prov. 1:7 cf. Ps. 14:1**)
“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction ... The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”
 - b. biblical wisdom is to take an ever-increasing knowledge of the Lord and apply it well to the various situations of life – it is to learn obedience from a deeper understanding of God (**Prov. 3:5-7**)
“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.”

- c. **so, Paul prays expectantly that the Spirit of God will fill the Ephesians with greater ability to discern obedience within their existence and success as a church**
- 4. “*revelation*” = something revealed; a hidden thing now exposed; a divine “opening”
 - a. **note:** (IMO) Paul has something slightly different in mind here (for *this* revelation)
 - b. specifically, that their ever-increasing knowledge of the Lord will lead them to a full revelation of **why** the divine decree is relevant and important to them as they live out their lives
 - 1. **LOW:** the more they learn *about* God, the more they *understand* God’s ways
 - c. not only the ability to use knowledge wisely (in obedience), but the ability to appreciate all of the interconnectedness of God’s ways (**i.e.** to achieve a *consistent* theological framework)
 - 1. **e.g.** a *shallow* theology is an *inconsistent* theology – it is filled with contradictions
 - d. **so, Paul prays hopefully that the Spirit of God will fill the Ephesians with greater ability to see the richness of God’s worldview within their existence and success as a church**
- d. the sight of Paul’s prayer (v. 18a)**
 - 1. so, what does Paul consider to be the “best” (over against the “good”) that he could pray for GFBC?
 - 2. “*having the eyes of your hearts enlightened*” – a summary of the above three (3) requests:
 - a. growing in a greater and greater knowledge of theology and doctrine
 - b. expanding in a greater and greater wisdom in the application of truth to life
 - c. reveling in a greater and greater insight into all of God’s thoughts and ways
 - 3. **Paul’s best prayer for the church is that the Father would send the Spirit to open our eyes to the depth of what he has ordained in his world, that we would take that knowledge and use it to be obedient (especially in prayer), and that we would revel in the richness of that revelation as it brings us more and more certainty and assurance before him**
 - a. and what is the result of this enlightenment? (**stay tuned**)