
The Prayer for Spiritual Perception

Ephesians 1:15-23

All religions pray in some way. Somehow there is deep in the soul a desire to communicate with what is thought of as being the divine, as being god. This powerful impulse reminds us that we were created to be worshippers. Prayer is an expression of worship.

Christian praying is different. The Bible teaches us to pray to God as a means of talking to Him. It is part of a relationship. It is personal. It is supposed to be a conversation between family members, one of whom is the King. This makes our praying different. We are not given prayers to recite (though some Christians do). We are given examples and patterns of praying in the Bible. We see people in the Bible praying. This text we take up this morning is a prayer.

This prayer is also a teaching tool for us. It is imbedded in a letter. What he says here is not just what he prays, but is written in way that we are to observe and learn from it. As Peter O'Brien writes, "Paul wants his readers to understand and appreciate the divine salvation, and in particular the place which they as God's people have in the divine purposes. What has been done in Christ is for their benefit: God's power in him is available for those who believe (v. 19), and Christ's rule over the universe is for their benefit (v. 22)." (O'Brien, p.152)

How important it is that we link our prayer and petitions to God (v.15-23) with our understanding and praise of God (v.3-14). This text drives home the importance of prayer that prioritizes the spiritual. Praying like this should mark our praying for one another.

In Why We Pray (v.15-16)

Expresses his confidence in their being recipients of the blessings

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

In its Motivations (v.15)

Paul is moved to pray for these people because of three things he values.

He is motivated by the glory of God's grace that he has extolled in the opening paragraph. God's grace to us and God's glory in Himself have been praised. That grace and glory have been effective in the life of these people. They have been blessed, chosen, redeemed, reconciled, predestined, adopted, sealed and united with all of God's people. So, because of this, he gives thanks for them.

He is motivated by their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They have believed the truth. They have believed the word of the gospel and put their hope in Christ. What God has done for them; He has also applied to them. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is the result of God executing or carrying out His purpose in individuals. This faith is in a person, Jesus and believes, trusts and rests in who He is. He is the Lord, the One who has the right to rule our lives. He is the Christ, the One who is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament.

He is motivated by their love for the saints. This love for other believers is an evidence of God's grace in the believers. It is a love that is not just focused on their friends, or family or even their church community – it is a heart for all the saints.

In its Focus (v.16)

Paul lets the church know he is praying for them. This is surely meant to encourage them. The Bible expects that Christians will pray for one another. In fact, the Bible's focus in prayer is on others. We tend to focus on our needs and wants. But Paul is showing his own faith in Christ and love for the saints by praying for them.

Love for the saints will fill our prayers with thanksgiving. The grace of God we see in the lives of others stirs up gratitude in our own. Paul was simply thankful to God for the believers in the church there.

He not only expresses his gratitude to God for them, but he also makes requests for them. He stresses the importance of praying for people with whom we are engaged in life. This church had been founded by Paul, taught by Paul and had grown under his ministry. But there would come a day when it would be infested with wolves and eventually would receive one of the letters in Revelation. 50 years after its founding the church would be characterized by hard work in ministry yet losing their first love for Jesus (Acts 20:17-38; Revelation 2:1-7). Yet Paul's requests for them focus on their spiritual needs.

In What We Pray For (v.17-19)

Paul's prayers so often flow from his theology, from the truths that have gripped his soul. At the heart of this prayer is that God would grant spiritual illumination and apprehension. He wants God to show us the light so that we can understand His Word.

¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

To Know God Better (v.17)

Paul asks the Father that we might know Him, God, better. The request that Paul makes is to God, the Father. He is the one being addressed, being spoken to. The Father will be the One who answers and grants the request.

In prayer we acknowledge the God we have. Paul is relishing the relationships between the Father and Son. What he says about God is true and therefore he is addressing the true God. To address the true God, you must acknowledge that He is a Trinity. He is One God and three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three persons interact with one another and with us. The second person of the Godhead, the Son, is spoken of here as "Lord Jesus Christ". This always recognizes His coming as a man, in a human body, Jesus. In this way, the Father is also the God of the Lord Jesus Christ while the second person of the Godhead, the Son, is also divine. Now, listen again to how our author says it, "May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you the Spirit of wisdom."

In his praying, Paul affirms how the petition is going to be answered. He states how it comes about. To know God better, the Father gives the Spirit to make the truths real to people. The Bible and Christians call this the illumination by the Holy Spirit. He turns a spotlight on so that what we know we now believe and understand.

Our requests for one another also ask the Father for the result, the end, for what it attains. Here, Paul wants them through the work of the Spirit to know God better. But this true, life-changing knowledge comes through the Spirit giving us wisdom and revelation. Knowing God in a spiritually profitable way happens when the Holy Spirit reveals God to our souls. The Spirit also gives wisdom. Spiritual wisdom is insight into God, His will, His ways, and His Word. This is not just abstract facts about God. It is not merely an ability to recite doctrine or wax eloquent on the attributes of God. It is a right knowledge of God in the soul that motivates us to intimate fellowship with Him.

"[Some] can devote thousands of hours to the diligent study of Scripture and yet still somehow display an extraordinarily shallow knowledge of God. Biblical knowledge can be merely academic and rigorous, but somehow not edifying, not life-giving, not devout, not guileless." D.A. Carson¹

That is why we need the Spirit who is one characterized by wisdom and revelation. To know God better requires spiritual wisdom that comes through a real, personal uncovering or disclosure of God in the soul.

To Know Truth Clearly (v.18-20)

The effect of the Spirit is to give light to our inner eyes, our heart, so that we can see God's truth. All of us have had the "Oh, I see" experience with something we already knew. This is what the Spirit's work does in us. Listen to me! I fear for us as Christians that just because we can talk about truth that we have experienced the truth

¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

In view of knowing Christ better, Paul wants us to know, to understand and to be transformed by these important truths that he has talked about earlier in the chapter. We need a clearer vision and deeper insight into our hope, our riches and our power.

Know the hope to which you are called

You have been called to something that is called *the hope*. You have been sovereignly summoned into salvation. That is your calling. What is the hope of His call? Hope in the Bible refers to what God has promised or purposed to accomplish. It is the Christian's expectation – what we look forward to. You have been called to something that you can confidently expect. All the blessings that God has promised and purposed for you including your inheritance are what you expect God to do. This is your hope.

But, we often set our hopes on other things. Most of the time, we set our hopes on things that are going to rust, fade, corrode or be destroyed at the end of days. These hopes then lead us to disappointments, heartaches, frustrations and depression. These symptoms point us to the disease of false hopes and temporal expectations.

The solution then is to truly know that which we are confidently expect so that we will value it in a way that draws our heart towards it. John Stott put it this way, "More simply, it was a call to an altogether new life in which we know, love, obey and serve Christ, enjoy fellowship with him and with each other, and look beyond our present suffering to the glory which will one day be revealed. This is *the hope to which he has called you*. Paul prays that our eyes may be opened to know it."

Know the riches of his glorious inheritance

I have a big surprise for you in the next sentence. You, yourself, are God's rich inheritance given to Christ.

[You may know] what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Commentators are divided here but it seems to me that this is intentionally different from its parallel in Colossians 1:12. The idea is that God has blessed us in such a way that we are flush with spiritual riches. We are then in return given back to God as an inheritance. This is not about personal worth or value, or even a value given to us after our redemption (a la F.F. Bruce). Rather, this is God, having blessed us, has also blessed Himself. So, His blessing us is not an act of giving something away. He has filled us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies and then will take us into those very heavenlies at our death or His coming.

Therefore, we are called to, in the words of O'Brien, "...live consistently with this high calling and accept with gratitude and true humility the grace and glory that he has lavished on us."²

Know His incomparably great power

Paul prays that we may know how great God's power is for us.

[To know] what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places

Do you see it? We are to now immeasurably great God's power is. How do we know how great it is? By the resurrection. The power God exercised in raising Christ from the dead is the power that is for us. That same in breaking of eternal life into the old creation breaks into our deadness in sin and brings us to life. So, we must have an eternity-based, Christ-focused view of ourselves in which God's power brings life out of death.

Knowing these things well is a means of knowing Christ better.

In What Makes Such Praying Possible (v.20-23)

Why does Paul pray like this? What could push us to ask these kinds of things for each other?

²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The Expression of God's Power (v.20)

We will pray like this when we come to be transformed by the expression of God's power. The more we know and understand what God has done in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the more we will understand what He has done in our redemption. We will be so gripped by the stunning power of God that we will want other believers to know it as well.

The Elevation of God's Son (v.21)

We will pray like this when we come to exult in the elevation of Jesus Christ. The superiority of Christ is a part of His exaltation. His being ascended and seated on the throne sets Him above all things in all places for all time. We will so exult in Jesus that we will pray for others to know Him in this way as well.

The Extent of God's Sovereignty (v.22-23)

We will pray like this when we come to understand the extent of God's sovereignty in Christ. Jesus has been giving the full and final authority over all the creation. He has been given headship over all the church. The church, His body, is where He grants His fullness as He indwells the church filling it all.

Reflect and Respond

Three simple questions will bring this prayer home to us:

Do you think about people like this? Does our heart rise in thanksgiving and prayer when we hear that people have become believers and are exhibiting the fruit of that salvation?

Do you think about prayer like this? Does this example of prayer in the Bible really challenge the way you pray? Do your prayers sound like this?

Do you think about God like this? When you pray, are the sovereignty of God and supremacy of Christ foremost in your mind? Do you worship like this?

Finally, there is no mistaking the centrality of Christ in this prayer. While it is for people, it is about our Lord Jesus Christ. May that be so in all of our praying.

¹ D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), p.15.

² O'Brien, Peter Thomas. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999., p.136