

Pentwater Bible Church

Ephesians Message 7

Prayer for God's Riches

The Believer's Walk



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The Book of Ephesians
Message Seven
Prayer For God's Riches and Service of the Believer
Pentwater Bible Church
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Review:

B. THE REVELATION OF ONE PREVIOUS MYSTERY, THE BODY OF CHRIST. 3:1-13.

1. THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD. 3:1-6

It is true that Paul was in prison in Rome for his teaching about Christ. We know that the non-converted Jews pressured the Romans to arrest Paul for rebellion for bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles and riling the Jewish population. They used Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile, as a ploy to have Paul arrested. The Jews thought that Paul brought this "Uncircumcised Gentile" into the Temple in violation of their "Law." Therefore they appealed to the Romans that Paul be arrested on the basis of civil disorder (Acts 21:21, 28; 28:16-31 etc.). This reference to "the prisoner" of Jesus Christ has stronger ties to the bond that he has with Jesus.

When one is imprisoned there are severe restrictions placed on behavior. Paul uses this illustration to narrowly define the work Christ had for him. He was to reach the Gentile world for Christ as well as write the majority of the New Testament for the Church. He went at this with singleness of purpose, not diverting his attention to other activities that would not lead to bringing others in to the Church as well as building on the foundation, which Jesus had laid.

Here he is not asking them "if" they have heard, he is saying "surely" as you have heard. He had been preaching God's Word in the general Asia Minor area before he came to Ephesus so they had to have heard of the general tenor of what he was speaking. The details of his message and ministry are in verses 3-12.

The word dispensation means "administration" (*oikonomia*-English economy) has the sense of stewardship or management. Paul's was to administer "God's grace" (Eph. 3:7), which was given to him. He elaborated on this in verses 3-6. This grace was given to him to dispense to the Gentiles. God works His creation somewhat differently during each dispensation. A dispensation is God's distinctive method of governing mankind or a group of men during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure and judgment. From the divine standpoint, it is a stewardship, a rule of life, or a responsibility for managing God's affairs in His house. From the historical standpoint it is a stage in the progress of revelation. Paul was responsible for applying the massive effort to get the Dispensation of Grace in action and fully activated.

Paul teaches a new component of the "mystery" of the Church as the Body of believers. Remembering that a biblical mystery is not one that remains puzzling which

nobody can realize. It is a mystery from the Old Testament that was not revealed until the Dispensation of Grace. It was not revealed in the Old Covenant. That period would also be known as the Dispensation of the Law. The Ephesian Christians would be able to understand his insight (Col. 1:9; 2:2) into the mystery of Christ (Col. 1:27; 2:2) by reading what he had “already written.” Each time a letter was received by a church from an apostle they read it aloud to the entire congregation many times.

Paul then revealed the time when the mystery was disclosed. The mystery was not made known to men in other generations as it is now being revealed. Revealed means, to uncover or unveil something that was previously covered or hidden. In God’s divine providence he has gradually revealed increasingly more of Himself since the fall when he cut-off fellowship with the human family. We call this progressive revelation. This “mystery” was revealed by the Spirit (Eph. 2:22), and its recipients were God’s holy apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20; 4:11). Verse 3:5 explicitly states that it was *given* to the apostles and prophets and that Paul was one who was to disseminate it. For example we see in Acts 10 Peter receiving a message from God regarding the gospel message that was to go to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

Paul reiterates the concept again exactly as the mystery was, that the Gentiles would be equally partakers of the Gospel of Christ. The Jews realized that they would be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49: 6; 56: 6-7) but not that they would be *equal* with them! They thought that the Gentiles would be converts to Judaism. The mystery though as it has been revealed was for both to equally participate in the Church, God’s new creation. In order for both parties to be included each is required to accept the finished work of Christ on the cross. Nobody is automatically included because of race, heritage or previous religious experience.

2. THE FELLOWSHIP OF A PREVIOUS MYSTERY. 3:7-13.

The term minister is actually servant in the original language. The word “servant” (*diakonos*) stresses not the idea of subjection (as does *doulos*, “slave”) but the idea of service or serving, as one who is a waiter (John 2:5, 9). This service has its basis in the gift of God’s grace (Eph. 3:2) given to Paul through the working of God’s power (1:19; Col. 1:29). The Greek more clearly implies that Paul’s service was initiated by “the gift of God’s grace” and continues by “the working (*energeian*) of His power” (*dynameōs*). Ministering this grace—by God’s strength, not his own—was Paul’s wonderful privilege of service.

Paul considered himself less than the least of all God’s people. (“God’s people” renders *hagiōn*, “saints”; cf. Eph. 1:1, 15). As we know he persecuted the early Church who were all Orthodox Jews, for straying from the Jewish Law and causing a major disturbance. We can see Paul’s deep humility in view of God’s incomparably generous grace. First, he was to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Second, he was to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery. Though Paul ministered to both Jews and Gentiles, he was especially designated as the apostle “to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 1:16; 2:7-8). These unsearchable riches are the greatest treasure for mankind in the world.

The Gentiles can know something of the riches of Christ’s blessings (“the riches of God’s grace” in Eph. 1:7 and 2:7 and the richness of His mercy in 2:4). Yet Christ’s

unbound spiritual wealth can never be fully comprehended. Paul was to disclose publicly *to everyone*, not just the Ephesians (Eph. 3:2) this stewardship of God's sacred secret (vv. 3-4, 6). This secret had been hidden in God (v. 5), the Creator of the universe. Even before creating all things God had in mind this wonderful truth as part of His eternal plan (1:4, 11).

Paul's assignment was to build the Church on the foundation (Chief Cornerstone) of Jesus the Christ. The purpose of this was to show the angelic host of heaven God's plan on this earth. Therefore Paul's ministry was that the manifold wisdom (*sophia*) of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. In classical Greek the adjective "manifold" (*polypoikilos*) referred to the beauty of an embroidered pattern or the variety of colors in flowers (cf. *poikilēs*, "in its various forms," in 1 Peter 4:10). The "manifold wisdom of God" does not refer to redemption as such but rather to the new relationship between believing Jews and Gentiles in one body. The medium by which this wisdom is communicated is the church; the recipients are the angelic hosts "in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 1:3). These "rulers and authorities" refer to both good and evil angels (demonic 6:12 and angelic 1:21). As the heavenly hosts witness the church, they see God's power to save sinful mankind through the physical death of the 2nd person of the Godhead, Jesus the Messiah.

It is only through the Lord Jesus Christ that God's eternal plan formulated before the foundation of the world can occur. The Church continues to rise through the ages since its birth at the first Pentecost after Christ's ascension like a building under construction. The foundation has been laid and the early believers who came in are like to lower stories of a building under construction. We who have come in later are in the upper stories and when the building is complete as the last Gentile has been added then the Lord will remove us from the earth to take us home to be with Him. This eternal purpose is not one where God changed His plan as mankind responded unfavorably to God's commands. God knew all along what we would do and planned accordingly (Isaiah 44: 7-10; 24-28; 46: 9-11; Jeremiah 10: 7, 12 etc.).

This boldness Paul speaks of is our invitation to approach God, as He has desired for many centuries since the fall. It is only through the work of Christ that access is open so a Holy God is able to fellowship with sinful humankind. Our faith in Him is the conduit whereby His grace is conveyed and when we believe we are given access. This access is followed by a glad welcome by Him as we approach His presence.

Paul finishes with do not be discouraged because of his sufferings for them. His sufferings were for their gain and glory. If Paul had not dispensed to the Gentiles the stewardship of God's grace, then Jews would not have been hostile to him and he would not have been imprisoned. His preaching brought salvation to the Gentiles, but it incurred the wrath of many Jews on him. However, many others became members of the church, Christ's body, and this was their glory. This too should be our prayer for each other that we do not grow weary (faint not) at the tribulations that this world brings our way and continue to teach Christ to this decaying fallen world. Obeying Christ is never easy. It requires us to take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). When Christ said that he meant exactly what He said, we follow Him until death. This means we will have suffering (Philippians 1:29) in this world as ambassadors of Jesus.

We will be rewarded for our perseverance. We can't fall back into the ways of the world regardless of what it wants of us. Many will try and take us back to the "Old Man"

and we must resist.

Today's Message:

C. PAUL'S SECOND PRAYER AND THE PURPOSE OF REDEMPTION. 3:14-21.

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

Paul starts this section of Scripture as one being overwhelmed by the realization that the Jews and Gentiles are now united in this former mystery, The Church, and he is chosen to bring this information to the Ephesian believers for promulgation to all future Christians through this book. He then says that in prayer to our creator he falls to his knees in praise and recognition of these wonderful glories, which He gave us in this dispensation, we call the Church Age. While prayer can be carried out in many different postures, the most humble and submissive is on our knees reaching out to God the Father. Paul prays five different petitions to God.

Ephesians 3: 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

The first petition is for us to be strengthened in our inner being by the wonderful knowledge (riches) imparted by the Spirit of God to us. His glorious riches might strengthen (*krataiōthēnai*, “be strong to overcome resistance,”) believers with power (*dynamis*, dynamic living power)

Ephesians 3: 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

The *second* petition is that Christ may dwell in our hearts. Christ finds His home in the hearts of the believers who invite Him in. The heart always refers to the center of the human's will and emotions and therefore our words and thoughts. With Christ's indwelling presence and the Holy Spirit strengthening our faith, the truth is strengthened as if roots of faith sunk deep into the well of truth to be grounded or firmly established in His unshakable love, the first and greatest of the gifts of the Spirit.

Ephesians 3: 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

The third petition is to comprehend with all other believers the unfathomable (length, height, depth) full understanding of God's wonders toward us.

The fourth petition is to know the love of Christ which passeth all human knowledge and wisdom. The more a Christian knows about Christ, the more amazed he is at Christ's love for him. Being filled with God is achieved through continual study and fellowship

with Him in prayer, devotions, Bible Study and Church fellowship. We will never achieve a full understanding of His love for us while we are on earth. We must not approach God as a philosophical or mental exercise alone. The God of the universe wants our souls and hearts to be wedded to Him in loving admiration as we explore that relationship with Him.

The fifth petition is to be filled with the fullness of God through the Holy Spirit, who gave this prayer. The final purpose is that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. The fullness of the Godhead is only in Christ, and only through Him is a believer made complete (Col. 2:9-10). Though in Christ this divine fullness is ideally a believer's already, Paul prayed that it might be experientially realized in each one (cf. Eph. 4:13). Experiencing God's moral excellence and perfection causes Jewish and Gentile believers to love each other. Positionally they are one in Christ. But we must experience it if we are to love each other as one in Him. We can never fully and rationally know Christ's love for us but we can experience it! God pours His love and power into believers making us complete in this life and preparing us for the life to come. The ultimate goal is for us to become so Christlike that as individuals Christ is seen in us by others.

Ephesians 3: 20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

God realizes more about us than we are aware of. He knows our thoughts past present and future. He realizes what we need before we are even aware enough of those needs to ask Him. He is far above our finite minds. Never limit God in our thoughts by our limited perception of Him. He sees all of our thoughts, emotions and plans. To the unfathomable depths of Christ's love for us is added the exceeding abundance of His power. If we are not regularly reading Scripture or choosing to spend our fellowship time with non-Christians we will remain darkened in our perception of God as influenced by unbelievers.

Ephesians 3: 21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

God alone deserves glory because He is glorious. Paul therefore ascribed to God glory, which is to be manifest in the church, where the miracle of love will occur, and in Christ Jesus, who made the combining of Jewish and Gentile believers possible. God's creation exists to glorify Him and the Church is the vehicle to provide the outworking of His plan here on earth. We have a large responsibility in the course of all human events to let God work through us as He sees fit to effectuate His plan for the world. This verse is known as "the doxology" or fitting end of this section of Scripture as Paul breaks out in spontaneous praise for the workings of God. We should too if we are spending time with Him. If not then we will likely not view God as anything miraculous and just a distant figure the ancients seemed to have some information about which enabled them to write these Scriptures. I pray your relationship with God is fresh, regular and steadfast so you too can experience the strength of that relationship as Paul describes its power in these verses.

Application of the Ephesian Doctrine:

Up to now in this book Paul has laid the doctrinal foundation of the truths he presented. Now he moves into the application section wherein specific instructions are given regarding the believer's walk in the world. We have received the *why* and *who* and are now about to receive the *what* in terms God's plan for His Church and its beloved members. Some have a tendency to skip right to the application of Biblical truths. In fact the "why" and "who" are more important to understanding than the "what" we are to do. Having explained the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers, and having prayed for that unity by both experiencing Christ's love, Paul will now show how we are to walk in the unity of that body. Spiritually gifted people are given to the church so that the body of Christ might grow up in all areas accomplish this. God's Church needs all members to exercise their spiritual gifts so that we grow into a healthy representation of Jesus on this earth.

III. THE BELIEVER'S CONDUCT IN THE WORLD. 4:1-6:24.

A. SERVING TOGETHER AND DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER (4:1-16).

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT. 4:1-6.

Ephesians 4: 1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

Paul exhorted them to walk (live a life) worthy of their calling. He said that I beseech you to walk worthy of your calling." Thus on the basis of what Paul wrote in chapters 1-3 he implored them to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received from Christ. The word "worthy" (*axiōs*) means "equal weight"; one's calling and conduct should be in balance. "The calling" refers not only to believers' salvation (cf. Rom. 1:5-6; 1 Cor. 1:9) but also to their union in one body. Therefore a Christian's conduct concerns both his personal life and his responsibility to other believers in the church. Our calling is not limited to our salvation but includes our service to the body as well. Christ called us to be servants. Christ wants us to be givers not takers or givers expecting a return.

Ephesians 4: 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

This verse lists four characteristics of the character of our mannerism within this world. Believers because of the privilege must *be* together, *serve* together, and *worship* together. We must not let the cares of this world separate us. The Roman-Greco cultures viewed humility as weak characteristics in human beings. This is not true in God's Church. Jesus exulted humility as a virtue (John 13: 13-15) we must too. Jesus expects us to be humble before God and our fellow believers as well. We must strive to serve one

another and not put ourselves above one another. We must also be gentle and patient with each other. We are all at different stages of sanctification because we came to Christ at different times in our lives and have individual spiritual growth rates. Humility, patience and gentleness can eradicate most problems in the local church today. Believers must be willing and able to share others burdens without expecting a reward. When Jesus said to love others the same way we love ourselves (Mark 12:31) he knew that we always put ourselves first. He expects us to be a family in the body of believers where we care for each other. Humility is the opposite of pride. Christians should not promote false humility, but should recognize who they are in God's program (John 3:30; Rom. 12:3).

Ephesians 4: 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It is the Holy Spirit that unites us. When we are unified in truth we can truly be unified. We cannot be unified around heresy or untruth. This genuine unity will produce peace within us. The Church faces many forces to tear apart the unity. Chief among these is heresy from false teachers. There are also others who want to inject discord into the body of believers. The Lord calls this an abomination to Him. He hates it and will severely condemn it.

Proverbs 6: 16-19 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Ephesians 4: 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

Christ desires our unity. Regardless of our backgrounds, ethnicity or culture we are all indwelled by one Spirit into the Body of Christ. Christianity is not a club to join with many different versions. It is a spiritual relationship to Christ and other believers through the Holy Spirit. Paul begins to list the *seven* elements of unity centered on the three Persons of the Trinity. These provide the basis for the spirit of unity that should exist in the body of believers. One body refers to the universal church, all believers (1:23; 2:16; 3:6). One Spirit is the Holy Spirit who indwells the church (2:22). The words, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, indicate that all believers have a common hope regarding their future with God (cf. 1 Peter 1:3; 3:15), a confidence that began at the time they were "called" to salvation (Eph. 1:4, 18; 2:7; 4:1).

Ephesian 4: 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

One Lord refers to Christ, the Head of the church. *One faith* speaks of the faith which is exercised by all Christians in Christ their Lord (Col. 2:7). *One baptism* refers both to water baptism, the outward symbol of the inward reality and the Spiritual baptism received at the point of belief.

Ephesians 4: 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all refers to God the Father and His relationship to all believers. The fourfold use of “all” refers to “all believers,” not “all mankind.” Certainly these characteristics are not common to all people. God is the Father “of” all who believe; they are His children (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26). And He is “over” all them as their Sovereign. He lives “through” them and manifests Himself “in” them.

Two observations should be noted about this list of seven unifying elements (Eph. 4:4-6). First, the Trinity is an integral part of the list. The one body of believers is actuated by one *Spirit*, so all believers have one hope. That body is united to its one *Lord* (Christ) by each member’s one act of faith, and its identity with Him is depicted by one baptism. One *God*, the Father, is supreme over all, operative through all, and resides in all. All seven components are united in the Trinity.

Second, the order in the listing of the three Persons of the Trinity is interesting. Paul began with the Holy Spirit rather than with the Father. The reason for this is that in the preceding verses he was discussing “the unity of the Spirit” (v. 3) and in verses 7-13 he discussed the gifts of the Spirit. The same order of Trinity Members is given in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, where Paul also discussed the gifts of the Spirit.

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