

Date: 25 June 2023

Scripture Passage: Ephesians 1:15-23

Title: Praying For The Church

Introduction

- We have finished the first 14 verses of Ephesians one. And who can forget some of the tremendous statements that Paul made in that beginning part of this this Epistle. Statements that speak of how believers are brought to Christ. Who can forget that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ? And that some of those blessings include such things as we have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that God has predestined us unto adoption in Christ, that we now are accepted by God in the Beloved. In Christ we have redemption through his blood. How about the fact that all things in heaven and earth are gathered together in Christ? Or that we in Christ have obtained an inheritance? And not only have we obtained an inheritance, but we have the Holy Spirit who is the seal, the guarantee of our inheritance until the Lord calls us to glory. All these things Paul has just communicated to the Ephesian Christians.
- Beginning with verse 15, he makes an application. See, verse 15 starts with the word “Therefore”. And that therefore is what links what Paul has just said about all the blessings in Christ to the action that Paul is about to take. The action that he is about to take is simply this: “I thank God”. I thank God. In fact, I don't cease thanking God for **you**, the body of Christ. I don't cease thanking God, making mention of you in all my prayers. This message reveals to us the importance of praying for our own church and for the church at large.
- Let us learn from this passage the importance of praying for others, the importance of praying for the Church of Jesus Christ, and especially the importance of praying for our own church. This message may be opened up under 3 headings. We want to ask the questions Why, How and What. So the first question that may be asked is why was Paul constrained to pray? Then the second question we would ask is how did he pray? And then thirdly, we would ask the question, what exactly did he pray for?

I. Why was Paul constrained to pray (15)?

- *Normally, one would pray when there is a need, persecution. Here, its because of genuine faith. While in Ephesus. preaching gospel & teaching believers (Acts 20:20-21, 27). Gospel of Christ crucified preached (1 Cor. 2:2). Until converted or unwanted (Acts 19:8-10 cf. Acts 18:4-6; Acts 17:4-5).*

Let's look at the first point. Why was Paul constrained to pray? Why do we pray? Normally we would pray for our needs. For example, when there's persecution, or when people are critically ill, then we pray for them. Now that is necessary, of course, and anything that burdens our heart should be brought to the Lord in prayer. But why was Paul constrained to pray in this situation? **Read Eph 1:15** . We see here that Paul prays to God because of knowing that the faith of the Ephesians were genuine. He gave thanks to God that the Ephesian Christians had genuine faith in the Lord.

Paul's statement is so out of the ordinary. It's so different in terms of the prayer that he is offering that it, that it seems out of place. How often do you hear people praying for the body of Christ? How often do you hear them praying for members of the body and the fact that those members have been gripped by the gospel? We normally thank God for the many blessings that he bestows on us. But here Paul says, I thank God for you, the Christian Church at Ephesus, the body of believers at Ephesus. And it's all linked back to Paul's understanding of how the gospel comes to people and how the gospel of Jesus Christ came to those Ephesians. And my friends, really how the gospel comes to us too.

Because what Paul sketches out there in Ephesians 1:3-14, all the blessings that have been poured out upon saints. What he sketches out there hasn't changed. God still is the one who is in control. God still is the one who elects people to salvation in Christ. God still is the one who redeems people in Christ. Christ died for those God has chosen. It hasn't changed. We have an inheritance because of Christ. You see that, it's that perspective that Paul has on what God has done. That's the perspective that is behind him, that's moving him to pray, to give thanks for the church.

Did the Ephesian Christian become whom they are, and loved one another and had faith, because they made a decision to accept Christ? Or is it because they realized they were elect and chosen by God, that their heart swells up in gratitude? Which is it? It was God determined in eternity, before the foundation of the world, that he will be gracious to some, irrespective of who they are or what they did. That is why when anyone comes to faith, all glory is given to God.

So the apostle Paul who preached the gospel to the saints there in Ephesus. He prays for their faith. He would have prayed for them to hear the gospel. He would have prayed for them to be saved. He would have prayed for the believers to bring the gospel to others. As we share the gospel my dear friends, we ought also to pray for those who hear it.

So this is the first reason why Paul was constrained to pray. Their faith. The faith of the Christians.

- *Not only faith, but spiritual growth, shown by love for all the saints. Saints in the Bible means true believers. Agape is sacrificial giving for good of others. A sure sign of conversion (1 Jn 2:9-11; 3:14; 4:7-8; 4:20-5:1). Loving all brethren as best as we are able. Not hating some while loving others. A powerful testimony to others (John 17:20-21).*

Why else did Paul pray? He gave thanks for their spiritual growth, shown by their love. In v15, it says "I give thanks because I heard of your love for all the saints". They have shown faith and they have shown love. Their faith was manifested by their love for other Christians in practical ways.

What are the two great commandments that our Lord gave. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind". And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Our love for God will be manifested by love for others. God loves his people. We should also show our love for his people. God desires that the elect to be called out of the world. We must also desire to have the elect to call out of the world. When we have experienced the love for God in Jesus Christ, we not only will love God because he first loved us. But we will also love his people. That's why we are constrained to want to bring the gospel to others.

Note that the word love here is the Greek word Agape. It is spiritual love that comes from being a Christian. It is sacrificial love. It is giving of ourselves for the good of others. It may be the giving of our time or our effort. It may be the giving of our attention or our prayer.

Genuine faith is shown by our love towards God, and our love towards others. Genuine faith will be shown by Agape. That spiritual love that is given to those who are converted.

II. How did he pray? (16-18)

- *Without ceasing. Not continuously but continually. What God begins He will bring to completion. He is always at work in life of believers.*

We come to the second section. Verse 16 to plus 18. How did he pray? Paul did so without ceasing, and focusing on spiritual understanding. Let's look at v16. **Read v16-17.** The concern of the apostle Paul was for them to grow in wisdom and knowing the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. And in v18, **Read v18.** The emphasis throughout is on the knowledge of God's word.

Without ceasing. What does it mean to pray without ceasing? Paul did not just keep praying for many days without eating or sleeping. No. That would not be practical. What it means rather is Not continuously, but continually. If we were to pray continuously nonstop, that would not be practical. For how long can we pray and how many items do we bring before the Lord? And we don't want to engage in vain repetition. God does not need us to pray continuously before he understands what we are praying for. And God is not just looking for the mere mechanics of how long you pray.

My dear friends. What God wants is a heart that trusts in him, and a heart that sincerely opens up your burden to him in prayer. He wants us to pray continually, on a regular basis, with spiritual understanding! Does God need our prayer? Absolutely not! He is God, he is perfect and holy. He does not depend on our prayers to exist. But God has commanded us through scriptures to pray. *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7* **What God begins He will bring to completion. He is always at work in life of believers.**

- *For spiritual understanding. Spiritual life given the priority, not physical (persecution, poverty). What is not seen, not what is seen. Faith, not sight. Understanding, spiritual sight, not feelings or activities. Mind, heart, will all involved, but in that order.*

And you can see here in this passage that Paul focusses on the Spiritual life. Paul is praying for the Ephesians, that God the Father would give them more of His Holy Spirit. Notice, by the way, that all three members of the Trinity are mentioned in verse 17. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that is in the knowledge of Him. In other words, God gives us access to His knowledge so that we may gain wisdom and revelation about Him.

That is why it is good to cultivate the habit keeping some quiet time every day. The Lord for example, took his disciples to the mountains to pray at a quiet place. We ought to take time off our day to be alone with the Lord, to be quiet with the Lord. We hear him speak to us by reading the Bible. The spirit of God enables us to hear God's voice through the reading of Scriptures. And in response, we pray to thank God for the spiritual understanding.

Do we really believe in prayer? Do we believe in the power of prayer? Do we believe that God will answer our prayer? *The Mind, heart, will all involved, but in that order.*

III. What did he pray for? (18-23)

- *Of the present, how to live Christian life (18). Hope. Certainty of things future. Called to live life of faith. Glory: Another way of stating same truth. Future blessing. Connected with union with Christ. Adopted, inheritance promised. Abundance.*

We come to the third section, verse 18 to 23. What did Paul pray for? We can divide it into the present, past, and future. Let us consider the present. **Read v18.** Paul prays in v18 “that you may know the hope of His calling”. What is this hope that Paul is talking about? He prays for them to know the hope of His calling. To be aware of the Christian hope. In Rom 8:24 it says “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”. So the hope that is being referred to is the Hope that we have in Christ, where we will one day be reunited with Him in glory. We are pilgrims on this earth and we are heading for our home which is in heaven. He's not only interceding for us now, but he's waiting for us. In John 14:2 it says “In My Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you”. The Lord will be with his people. We will be worshipping God and serving him there forever and ever. There will be no more sorrows of this world. No more jealousy, no more envy, no more slender. Life in heaven is something for us to look forward to. That is our Christian hope.

It is a certainty that we will be in heaven with the Lord. If you have that Christian hope, it will condition how you live. You will have a sense of direction. You will have a sense of purpose, and you will have a sense of destiny. **We want to live to God's glory.** We want to serve love Him who first loved us, and we want to love His people just as the Christ is his bride. We don't live to earn merit for our salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. Christ has done it all on the cross. Turn from your sins and trust in Christ, and he will give you life with hope for the future. So concerning the present life, that we may have this hope that comes to faith in Jesus Christ, so that we may live to God's glory. We have been accepted as children of God. He has promise us that we will share in the inheritance of Christ.

- *Of the past, know what has happened to them (19-20). Conversion is totally the work of God. Mighty power of God, 'cos we were dead in trespasses & sin (see next chapter). The same power resurrected Christ. Not a power similar to, but the same. Cf. Lazarus, who was spoken to before he rose. This helps us understand evangelism & conversion. Some preach with no result. Right doctrine but no dependence on Spirit. Others produce spurious results. Zeal, no correct doctrine.*

The second thing that prayed Paul prayed for was for their past. To understand what they were like before conversion, and what it took for them to be saved. **Read 19-20.** Salvation is of the Lord. It is the mighty work of God brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, that same Holy Spirit with the same power will give eternal life to us. In Eph 2:1, it says “and you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins”. You were once dead. How could you have chosen God? As we saw in Chapter 1:4, God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world!

It shows to us how impossible it is to convert a person by human effort. We may need persuasion. We may need perseverance in the work of bringing the gospel to others. We must at the same time remember that it is **not** by our clever persuasion that souls are saved. God may use us as vessels to bring the gospel to others, but let us not rely on our persuasion to convert the person. We want to entrust ourselves to God in our efforts in sharing the Gospel. We want God to use us as the instrument in sharing the gospel, and we ought to be effective in doing so. We need to be well verse in scripture and to be able to put on the armor of God. But let us not rely on our own ability. No amount of speaking, no amount of persuasion will change anyone in a spiritual way. It is the Spirit who raise Christ from the dead that will work a mighty power to give eternal life to those who hear the gospel. It may seem like no one is responding to the gospel call, *But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.* (2 Peter 3)

Salvation is truly of God. Therefore, let us be prayerful. We pray before we perform outreach. We are prayerful in the process of carrying out outreach, and we pray when we return. The church must pray for all the ministries that it engages in.

- *Of the future, know what awaits them (21-23). Looking up. Christ now exalted above all angels, seated with the Father. Given authority above all principality & power (rule & authority), might & dominion (v 21). No rulers, operating under satanic influence, can prevail. Until all under Him. For good of the church. So that Christ glory & power exercised, acknowledged, seen. Believers will share in His rule. Church will display His glory.*

The future. **Read 21-23.** Christ is now exalted above all angels, and is seated with the father. Christ is given the authority above all principality & power (all rule & authority), all might & dominion. The work of God will continue. No rulers operating under Satan’s influence can prevail. It might not appear so at the moment to most of us. There’s so much bad and evil happening in this world. How can God let that happen. We have to remember that we are His creatures. We are short sighted. We cannot see far. **God is fighting the battle. Victory is certain. The gates of Hades will not prevail.**

All that happened in this world will be to the good of the church, so that the glory of God in Jesus Christ will be manifested. The church will display his glory. **Read 3:20-21.** The glory of God is being manifested in the church. And it will continue from generation to generation until Christ returns to judge the world. Then the church will be complete in heaven on the new earth. The church will be manifesting forth the full perfect glory of God.

So when we pray for the church, let us remember to pray for our present life to be lived in accordance to the Christian hope and to God’s glory. And to remember our past, where God’s mercy has been shown to us underserving sinners. Just as we have been saved by the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit, so also

we must rely on his resurrection power to save souls. And remember our future. Christ is seated at the right hand of the father. He is ruling over all things. It will help us face our trials on this earth knowing that our God in heaven has dominion over all the earth. He has promised that he will never leave us nor forsake us.

Summary

- *Conversion too wonderful an experience, to look for other experiences.*

As we close. Let us note firstly that our conversion is too wonderful an experience. It cannot be explained, and can only be experienced. Have you had this experience knowing God as your father in heaven?

- *Commitment is called for, not to be sidetracked to worldly pursuits. Love the brethren, ch.*

Secondly, we note that commitment to the Lord is called for. In Luke 9:23, we are each to take up our own cross and follow after the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't want to be side tracked away by worldly pursuits. Let us serve the Lord. Let us work to his glory and to the edification of the church. Let us live our life faithfully before God. Let us love the brethren who make up the church.

- *Conviction to pray. Thank God for what He is doing. Kingdom growing in hearts of many. Nothing can stop growth. We are part of that divine program.*

Finally, let us learn the importance of prayer. Yes, we must believe in the power of prayer. Thank God for what He is doing in different parts of the world. Nothing can stop God's kingdom from growing. Let us put on the armor of God and be useful to His kingdom. We must believe that God does answer the prayer of his children when we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Pray for souls to be saved as they hear the gospel. Pray for those who bring the gospel to others. And pray for those who have come to faith.

- *In short, believe in Him, trust in Him, serve Him.*

We know that all things will work to the good of those who love him, who are the called according to his purpose. Believe in Him, trust in Him, serve Him. May God have all the glory.