

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabible.org.

Date: September 6, 2009

Title: The Prayer of the Apostle Paul for the Ephesians

Text: Ephesians 1:15-23

Theme: Paul prays for his audience to know the person of Christ, the promise of the inheritance and the power of God, believing this is a priority for them and for us. The Church, His body, is to be the agent for speaking peace from peace.

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

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Introduction:

What I hope we can do is move past an analysis of what the text says about Paul's prayer and see how this applies to us right now, regardless as to our current circumstances.

"This prayer is the second of the eight long sentences in this epistle (1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:2-13, 14-19; 4:1-6, 11-16; 6:14-20) with 169 words."¹

As a believer I have always believed in prayer, yet as a Pastor where my inability becomes so much more obvious, I find myself compelled to pray and to believe even more so in the efficacious nature of prayer. If prayer is of no value, then a primary component of my ministry as a Pastor is removed. What Paul does here guides me, but also speaks to me on a much deeper level. It resonates within my soul as a shepherd of sheep. I understand what Paul is saying.

As a side note, this Fall we are offering a class on prayer. I would encourage you to take it. I believe it will be profitable and a rich blessing.

What Paul is about to do is directly tied to what we have just noted. Paul's prayer flows from the rich thought of God's immeasurable redemptive work. Paul wants his audience to know what this means for them.

THE BIG PICTURE:

The Storyline:

The Holy Spirit wants us to be overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of who God is, what He has done and who His people are because of this. But why does He desire for us to see who He is as Trinity and who we are in Him? It is as we grow in our knowledge of who He is, what He has done, and who we are in Him that we consciously give Him glory.

The Problem:

Our problem is simple: we are blind, deaf, and dumb as to who God is, what He has done, and who we are in Him. While we pray this prayer, we must consistently place ourselves in any context where God's revelation and work transpires. God is speaking and He is working, but are you there listening and living? May we act on God's enablement in the answering of Paul's three-fold prayer.

Questions:

1. The outcome for Paul's prayer is that the Church would be the agent for change producing peace within the community, nation, and world at large. How are we working from peace for peace?
2. With the desire to enlarge your own prayer life, look at your requests and compare them to those of the apostle's. How might you "improve" your request for yourself and for others?
3. What might be the best thing you could do right now in light of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the immeasurable greatness of God's person and work.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to seek Him above all else.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in His work and forsaking our own.

Outline:

I. Paul's promptings to Prayer (v. 15).

"For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints" (Eph. 1:15).

"Here there is set out before us in a perfect summary the characteristics of a true Church. The two things which must characterize any true Church are *loyalty to Christ* and *love to men*."² Let us note both.

A. The Ephesians' Faith:

"For this reason" ties this prayer directly into the preceding thought. God as Trinity has fully engaged His essence and energy in the securing of His people from their sin and adopting the same as sons and daughters, and because you have embraced this word of truth, the gospel of the salvation, I am praying for you.

Paul has already spoken to the idea of "hope" (v. 12), "heard" (v. 13) and "believe" (v. 13). He has not however explained to us what this means.

The idea of "faith" speaks to "the ongoing conviction of the truth (both saving faith and keeping faith)." Faith has an objective element as well as a subjective element. Objectivity comes into play in the object believed. Subjectivity is the exercising of our will in the object believed. I continue to argue that there are two competing ideas when attempting to unpack the meaning of faith. **First**, saving faith is "the knowledge of, assent to and unreserved trust in the word of truth." This is how the Scripture speaks to the various parts of faith's anatomy. It is like speaking of an individual as bone, flesh and blood. This is a means of describing what we are, but it is only a part of the whole picture. Being human is more than this; there is a side

to being human that exceeds our ability to understand. So it is with faith. **Second**, saving faith has a “mysterious” (i.e. subjective) side to it whereby we cannot always explain it but we know when it is present. How is one’s faith seen? by love.

“They had placed their faith in the Lord Jesus. This is not only the initial act of faith mentioned in verse 13, but a continuing faith in the Lord Jesus.”³

B. The Ephesians' Love:

The Scripture does not know of a faithless love or a loveless faith. The two ideas are so intertwined as to be inseparable. This is John’s point in his letters. Yet what is biblical love? Biblical love, a love produced by the Holy Spirit in and through His people, is a sacrificial giving of oneself for the benefit of others.

“The term ‘love,’ . . . has the idea of that which seeks to give rather than possess, always seeking highest good or the will of God in the one loved.”⁴

What does this mean for where they/we are at?

1. Their love was sacrificial / **Agapa**
2. Their love was beneficial
3. Their love was impartial / “all”

It is because of their faith in the work of God that His love now flowed through them to the church of God. This theme is prominent throughout the letter.

“The true Christian loves Christ and loves his fellow men. More than that, he knows that he cannot show his love to Christ in any other way than by showing his love to his fellow men. However orthodox a Church is, however pure its theology, and however noble its worship and its liturgy, it is not a true Church in the real sense of the term unless it is characterized by love for its fellow men. The true Church is marked by a double love – love for Christ and love for men.”⁵

Paul moves from what prompts him to pray to an expression of his resolve or pattern in prayer.

II. Paul's pattern in Prayer (v. 16).

“do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:16).

What are some of the qualities of Paul’s prayer life that are seen in v.16?

- A. It is persistent [it is not locked into a specific time]

Two phrases are used to show Paul's persistency in prayer. Praying without ceasing is a mindset. It is a God-consciousness.

4. "Do not cease giving thanks for you"

Paul's word choice seeks to convey the idea that he is persistent in his prayers for their well-being. Paul's opening statement says, "I do not stop and I persistently give thanks for you."

5. "Making mention of you in my prayers"

Again Paul emphasizes the persistent nature of his prayers before God in their behalf. "Making mention" is a present middle/passive participle. Paul as a servant of God and as a Christian was committed to a life of prayer. I believe Paul prayed not simply because the Scripture called him to pray, but because it was the only way to address the needs of the sheep in the light of his glaring inadequacy.

B. It is personal [it is intimate not detached]

Sometimes our prayers are generic. Many of us pray for the larger work of God without necessarily knowing the details. Yet within this community of faith, our prayers for one another should be intimate and personal. If I cannot pray for you with a level of intimacy, then this speaks to our lack of fellowship and relationship. I do believe Paul prayed generically for the entire church of Ephesus and the Asia Minor region, but I also believe he prayed for specific elders and church congregants as noted in the closing of his various letters where he names specific individuals.

A. It is positive [it thinks of who His people are in Christ and not what they were in Adam].

"Do not cease giving thanks for you"

The word for "thanks" is our English word, "Eucharist." When we celebrate the Lord's Table we are giving thanks for His immeasurable work of redemptive for His people. "Giving thanks" is a present active participle. This speaks to its habitual nature. This is what marked Paul's prayer life (cf. 1 Thess. 5:18). Paul's prayer for the people of God was marked by a glad refrain. Because of His love for Christ, he loved Christ's body, the Church. I do not believe we should ever hate the church of Christ, regardless as to the error that exists in their theology or liturgy. We might mark their error, but it cannot be pushed by a negativity that divides and destroys.

So far we have seen what prompted Paul to pray and how his prayers were highly personal, positive and persistent. Now let us consider the body of his petition. For what did he pray?

III. Paul's petition in Prayer (vv. 17-23)

¹⁷ “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ²⁰ Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: ²² And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, ²³ Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:17-23).

Initially let us ask ourselves two questions.

- For what is v.17 asking?

Paul is asking that the believers would know the Lord Jesus better. We are prone to muddy the waters by dissecting the verse too closely, yet the bottom line is that they might know Him better.

- Why do you think Paul makes this request a priority in his prayers for them?

Remember from where Paul has just come in vv. 3-14. Paul has just described our incredible blessings in Christ and yet the average believer allows this truth to run off them like “water on a duck’s back.” Paul knows that if the believer laid hold of who Christ is and what He has done and is doing, that transformation would be inevitable.

I have attempted to break Paul’s prayer into three manageable petitions. Notice how the text begins. It is only as we are given the Spirit of insight and revelation that we will know Him.

“The Spirit of wisdom and revelation teaches the Christian to grasp the heavenly, divine things and reveals to them that which otherwise would remain hidden to them.”⁶

A. That they might know the Person of God/Christ (v. 17)

Paul prays for them to receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation. I believe this prayer is for them to see how all the various pieces of God’s eternal plan fit together in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This idea is present in verses 8-10. If we see the big picture planned by God, it will enable us to persevere, to endure when life produces an overwhelming sense of sadness.

Paul desires for them to know Christ more and more each and every day. He is praying that the Holy Spirit would continue to unveil their eyes and unblock their ears so that they might see and hear God.

This prayer for the spirit of wisdom and revelation is focused on the knowledge of him. This knowledge is **epignosko**, a full or rich knowledge. It is a knowledge that is personal and intimate. I do not doubt that we “know” Christ, but I do question as to whether or not we really “know” Christ in a personal and intimate way. I know many of you, but I do not know you in detail or intimacy. The person I know the most is my wife and she knows me intimately. She knows me in ways that I do not know myself. Paul prays for his audience so that they might know Christ in an intimate way that is delightful and sustaining.

You cannot know God apart from the Holy Spirit working the Word of God in and through your mind. Somehow our worldview is shaped as we know God through the Word and as our enlightened minds see Christ in all the various pieces of life.

Paul’s first request is that the truth of Christ might be laid open to us and that we might know how to apply the revealed truth to our lives. It is a prayer for further illumination, for a more accurate knowledge of Him.

B. That they might know the Promise of the inheritance (v. 18)

The language Paul uses seeks to capture the richness of something that is highly unexplainable, “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.” Whatever it is that needs to be received and unclogged, he is praying to God to do the dispensing and the unclogging so that we might “get it.” It is only as “the eyes of our hearts are enlightened” that we can begin to comprehend the promise of the inheritance.

“Hope of His calling” = The expectation of good. For the Christian it is the confident expectation of eternal salvation. His calling involves both the general and effectual. Here it is specifically in reference to God’s effectual, efficacious call in salvation. The believing can trust God to keep His word and to fulfill His promise as it relates to the finishing of the work that He alone began.

“Hope for believers is not the world’s wishful thinking, but the absolute certainty that God will make true what he has promised.”⁷

These two ideas appear to be parallel in thought. The saints of God, by receiving the inheritance of redemption (vv. 11-14), become the inheritance God receives for Himself.

“Riches of His inheritance” = That which is given as a possession. Although this inheritance is unseen at the present it must be a real part of the believer’s daily experience. “Either the inheritance we have from God (v.14) or the inheritance God receives, i.e., the saints themselves.”⁸

Everything up to this point has a tendency to exceed my capacity to comprehend. It appears “other worldly.” It is as if we are ready to ask Paul, “What planet do you hail from?” Is it possible that what Paul just said can speak to me in my doubt and despair? What do I do with the confusion that swirls all around me and within me? Here is how Paul closes this initial thought and it is found in his third petition.

C. That they might know the Power of God (vv. 19-23)

1. The magnitude of His power (v. 19)

Remember how we have already noted Paul's default word to describe God, "Immeasurable?" When words prove inadequate, we simply say, "Awesome." We are not quite sure what this means anymore, but whatever we see as awesome in this created order it is but a shadow of the one who alone and only is "awesome."

"Paul heaps one word on another to express the greatness of God's power that is available to the believer."⁹

Paul's third petition is that we would come to understand what we have working in our behalf. We have the immeasurable greatness of His power." This still does not explain what this is for us. Because of this, Paul gives us two examples of this power in order for us to understand just how glorious all this is. Both pictures describe something that cannot be equaled by anything created.

2. The manifestation of His power (vv. 20-23)

1a. It is a resurrection power (v. 20a)

"This power of the creator God at once sets itself apart from, and establishes itself as superior to, all the 'powers' that people might ever come across."¹⁰

2b. It is a ruling/reigning power (vv. 20b-23)

a. This reign is immediate ("worked, raised, seated")

I want to note in passing how Paul speaks of something that is currently happening. He is not speaking of something that is future, but something that is present and immediate. Christ is seated and has the authority and we, the church, are His body that is filled with "the fullness of him who fills all in all." This power is available for our daily use. N.T. Wright correctly notes how, "Far too many Christians today, and, one suspects, in Paul's day, are quite unaware that this power is there and is available."¹¹

b. This reign has no equal ("far above all")

This statement speaks to His rank.

"As in Col 1:16, so here Paul claims **primacy** for Jesus Christ above all angels, eons, what not. These titles all were used in the Gnostic speculations with a graduated angelic hierarchy."¹²

c. This reign is all inclusive ("far above all")

King Jesus rules over all powers and principalities both visible and invisible.

“But when he speaks of Christ as exalted over all possible rulers and authorities, we know that he means what he says. The local magistrates and officials; provincial rulers and governors; kings, princes and the emperor himself: all are subject to King Jesus. And King Jesus has, as his hands and feet, his agents within the present world, the church. It is ‘his body, the fullness of the one who fills all in all’. If only the church would realize this, and act accordingly.”¹³

“He is saying that there is not a being in heaven or on earth to whom Jesus Christ is not superior. In essence Paul’s prayer is that men should realize the greatness of the Savior God has given to them.”¹⁴

d. This reign is powerful (“under His feet”)

The imagery is that of conquest. Jesus has conquered and God the Father has placed “under His feet” all things created. Everything is subject to Him.

e. This reign is visible (“the church, which is His body”)

The church is further clarified by the vital union which exists between a head and its body. The Church is the fullness. The body is depicted as that which completes the head in the New Creation.

“The central point of this passage is that believers have the power that raised and seated Christ far above every power: We are to appropriate that power in light of the spiritual warfare that is portrayed in chapter 6.”¹⁵

The entire letter celebrates the unity of His body brought about by the Triune God. This unity has Christ as head and the church as His body and all creation under His feet. What we see appears so conflicting as it is contrasted with what we read. Yet His death will bring visible unity from the disconnect that results from the curse. The means through which God works this peace is His Church. The church is the agent for change. Yet how can we speak peace when there is disharmony within a community of faith? We must ask God to bring peace within our own relationships so that we can speak peace to a world at war.

The following statement is how William Barclay speaks to this issue. His words are startling. “It means nothing less than that God’s plan for one world is in the hands of the Church.”¹⁶

Think about this. We moan at the dissension that exists in our nation, our homes, our marriages, and our world. Yet we, I believe unknowingly, become warmongers. We hold grudges, become bitter, refuse to forgive, harbor resentment, are agents of agitation and dissension and we are all this in the name of Christ. God redeemed us from sin’s debt and adopted us as sons and daughters in order that we might be the agents/body through which peace is created. I am ever mindful of the tension and wish only peace.

I continue to confess that the wonder and marvel of all this shakes me simply because my experience does not always align with God's magnificent descriptions of who I am as a member of His body sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise. Yet this is my continued prayer for me and for you -- that we would push past the veil of reluctant and obscuring experiences into the glorious truths of His person, promise and power.

Somehow in the praying of this prayer, which we can assume is a priority for Paul, Paul believed the problems encountered by his audience would be faced and patiently endured.

Is this true? Is Paul speaking of something that is fine for Sunday morning but woefully inadequate for Monday through Saturday? Friends, I do not believe so. Unless and until we make this our prayer, we will flounder in darkness, depression, despair and dysfunction.

Shepherding the Sheep: (What's the NEXT STEP?)

1. The reader should know the framework for biblical praying.
2. The reader should understand how the various parts of prayer fit into a meaningful whole.
3. The reader should apply Paul's prayer to his own prayer life and seek to be wise as they talk to God.
4. Note the content of your own prayers. Do you know the person of Christ, the promise of heaven, and the power of God? How should you pray for those you pray for the most?
5. Can you begin to see the parallels between vv.1-14 and what Paul has prayed in vv.15-23?
6. **Before you leave today, why not find someone to pray with as it relates to this prayer, and if you cannot find someone to pray with then pray alone to God this prayer for yourself and perhaps for others whom God lays on your heart.**

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 247.

² emphasis his, William Barclay, *Galatians/Ephesians*, 88.

³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 249.

⁴ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 250.

⁵ William Barclay, *Galatians/Ephesians*, 89.

⁶ George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 103.

⁷ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 265.

⁸ NIV Study Bible

⁹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 268.

¹⁰ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 15.

¹¹ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 16.

¹² emphasis added, *A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures* on Ephesians 1:21.

¹³ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 16, 17.

¹⁴ William Barclay, *Galatians/Ephesians*, 92.

¹⁵ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 280.

¹⁶ William Barclay, *Galatians/Ephesians*, 93.