

## AN EXAMPLE OF SERIOUS PRAYER

(SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2019)

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**Scripture Reading:** 10 Words; Eph. 1:15-20

### INTRODUCTION

John Calvin said of prayer:

When we present ourselves before God ... the finest rhetoric . . . is pure simplicity.

And Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones said:

If you have never had any difficulty in prayer, it is absolutely certain that you have never prayed.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have one of a number of examples of the prayers of the Apostle Paul.

Not seeking to impress others.

Not given as the template we must follow.

But certainly, it is given for your encouragement and instruction.

Prayer is not a replacement for work God calls you to be doing.

If you have a job, you don't pray instead of going to work.

However, prayer is essential for the work that God has called us to do.

Prayer for each other is essential for the life that God has called us to live.

Just finished the great opening part of Ephesians in verses 3-14.

From these incredible words of praise related to God's sovereignty and work of grace and salvation, Paul turns naturally to pray for those in the region of Ephesus.

This intercessory prayer as you can see leads to the praise of our God and the exalted place of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We will focus on verses 15-20. Next week, Lord willing, we will continue with verses 20-23.

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<sup>1</sup> Both quotes from John Blanchard, ed., *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*, Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), s.v. Prayer - Essence.

Like the previous section, verses 15-23 also compose one rather long sentence in Greek.<sup>2</sup>

We must pray for others. We must pray according to God's truth and in great expectation of His power.

We will look at verses 15-20 in 2 parts.

### 1) WE MUST PRAY, EPH. 1:15-16

Is this the letter to just the Ephesians?

First study I shared that this likely was a letter written to believers in Ephesus and other cities in the area.

Verse 15 supports this idea.

How?

The language of verse 15 expresses that Paul did not know personally everyone he was addressing.

It is not the language you would use to those that you spent three years with.

Now of course, this letter was written a few years after Paul finished his ministry in Ephesus.

We also recall that Paul's ministry in Ephesus reached people throughout the area and Paul would not have known all of them personally.

Instead of knowing directly about them, **he heard about them.**

What he heard was most important.

Their faith in the Lord Jesus.

Their love for all the saints.

This is the testimony we all should have.

Notice the triad of hope, faith, and love that we see in verse 15 and the previous verses.

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<sup>2</sup> Lane T. Dennis and Wayne Grudem, eds., *The ESV Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), paragraph 22226. Other like Snodgrass also mention this.

Verses 11-14 are focused on the hope that we have – our promised inheritance.

Verse 15 speaks of faith and love.

**1Cor. 13:13** And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

It is also interesting to compare this reference to love to what later you find in the letter to the church of Ephesus in Rev. 2.

What was the indictment of the church in Ephesus in Rev. 2?

**Rev. 2:4** Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

We do consider the letters might not be focused entirely on the same group of people, but there must be at least some overlap.

Faith in Jesus Christ is of course essential.

Without faith there is no true spiritual life.

Without love, there is likely no true faith.

Love is not the replacement for faith. Love for others, especially for all the saints, is the first of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The love that we are commanded to show is the result of God's work of grace in our lives.

And how do we define love?

It is based on what God has done for us.

God gave His best. He is slow to anger with us and abounding in love.

He does not just give us that which we deserve. He is merciful.

Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.

This love, this fruit of the Holy Spirit, should be present and obvious.

Hearing this testimony, Paul turned to thanksgiving and intercession.

Do not cease to give thanks.

Cease – Same verb used in Col. 1:9.

**Col. 1:9** For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you,

Here in Ephesians., Paul's prayer began with giving thanks.

It then continued in specific prayer for those in the Ephesus and beyond.

Later I will share some thoughts on praying for others, but here we can say that Paul expressed the fact that he did not pray in just a general way, but prayed for specific groups.

We are limited as creatures, but we should seek to do the same.

1) Persistence and thanksgiving

2) Focus and remembrance of people and churches

**2) WE MUST PRAY ACCORDING TO GOD'S TRUTH AND EXPECTATION OF HIS POWER, EPH. 1:17-20**

When someone is praying, do you want to always be analyzing or critiquing the prayer?

Want to be alert to something heretical.

But we don't want to be overly critical.

I say this not as a caution for Paul's prayer, but that this prayer was not given to be hyper-analyzed.

There are questions that commentators have about the structure and how we understand all the phrases.

Try to focus on the big picture and what is clear.

Verse 17: main request

Verses 18-19: 3 purposes

The last purpose of knowing God's power then is connected with the remainder of this chapter.

As I mentioned Paul filled with praise, turns to sharing specific requests, which leads back to praise and a focus on the glory of our great God.

Let's begin with verse 17.

Paul prays to the Father.

It is not that we have to only pray exactly like this, but there is a basic pattern that we do find in Scripture.

**Eph. 2:18** For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Notice also how the Father is described.

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ

The Father of Glory

This language does not mean that somehow that God the Son is less divine.

We do carefully consider these things.

Jesus is fully God and fully man.

Language like this also does reflect the incarnation of the Son of God.

John Calvin wrote:

Let us remember, however, that this relates to his human nature; so that his subjection takes nothing away from his eternal godhead.

The Father of Glory is a beautiful phrase also rich in meaning when you consider the background of the OT.

Moses wanted to see the glory of God.

He was told, you cannot see my glory and live.

He was given a partial view of God's glory.

Here we consider that although we cannot grasp the fullness of the God we serve, He has chosen to reveal Himself to us.<sup>3</sup>

Entire record of revelation in the OT.

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit.

The completion of the canon of Scripture.

Central request – v. 17: **may give to you (plural) the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.**

Spirit – Holy Spirit or referring to something spiritual?

Commentaries and translation differ here.

I think it makes sense to see Paul is praying for the working of the Holy Spirit in the believers he was writing.

This working of the Holy Spirit is not just intellectual knowledge or facts.

The work of the Holy Spirit is so that we will truly have an understanding and knowledge of the only true God.

This language speaks of the communion, the fellowship that we enjoy with God because of His sovereign work of grace.<sup>4</sup>

**1 John 1:3** that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

This language is a twofold summary of what God has done for us in saving us and then what is the essence of the Christian life – the true knowledge of the Triune God.

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<sup>3</sup> Snodgrass, 72.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 10; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 68.

Note next the start of verse 18 – the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.

Is this a further request?

Some translations understand it this way.

It can be viewed as something already given.

The NET Bible understands Paul to be saying this:

“I know that you are saved, that you have had the blinders of the devil removed; because of this, I can now pray that you will fully understand and see the light of God’s glorious revelation.”

Then you can see in verses 18 and 19 that there are three specific things Paul mentions as goals or ends for which he prays.

- a. To know the hope of his calling (1:18a)
- b. To know the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints (1:18b)
- c. To know His incomparably great power (1:19)<sup>5</sup>

Let us consider these three requests.

### **Hope of His calling**

Two more times in Ephesians, Paul uses the word calling.

**Eph. 4:1** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the **calling** with which you were called,

**Eph. 4:4** *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your **calling**;

The word calling is also a very important word when you think of how it is used in Scripture.

Think of Samuel being called by God.

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<sup>5</sup> Snodgrass, 72.

The prophets were also given a calling.

Saul going to Damascus.

God's sovereign work in our lives can be summarized in terms of God's calling.

Here the focus is on the **hope** connected with God's calling.

The sure promises that we have both for this life and the life to come.

**Psa. 34:22** The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

**Psa. 37:9** For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.

Riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

Even a casual reading of Scripture shows in general how weak the general Christian vocabulary in use today is.

Not that our words must sound like we are all high and mighty and so superior.

What depth there is in just a phrase of God's word!

We might wish to tell Paul, can you keep it a little simpler for us?

How should we understand this rich phrase?

There are different understandings, like I said earlier there would be.<sup>6</sup>

Listen to Acts 20:32.

**Acts 20:32** "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Inheritance - verse 11, verse 14.

Is this speaking of God's gift to us or that we are God's inheritance?

Probably it speaks of God's inheritance.

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Foulkes vs. Snodgrass.



And the phrase among the saints speaks that God has a people that He has chosen for Himself that shows His glory.

He has chosen a people from every tongue, tribe, and nation.

**This is a prayer that we will come to see how great and how vast God's sovereign work is.**

It is a very appropriate prayer.

### **Exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe**

The word exceeding – basis for our word hyperbole, something exaggerated.

Here it means something that goes beyond everything else.<sup>7</sup>

His hyperbolic mega power...

Paul is not saying that God gives us this incredible power.

It is rather that God has exercised this power in saving us.

And it is this same power that was demonstrated in the resurrection of our Lord and His ascension.

The ESVSB also notes:

Power over supernatural forces through magic and the occult was a great concern in ancient Ephesus (Acts 19:19), but the power of the living God in Christ trumps all competing authorities (Acts 19:20).<sup>8</sup>

The power that raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavenly places, continues to be at work in those who believe.

Now sitting here in your pews today, I realize that it may not at all seem that God is so working in your life.

Where is the evidence that this power is indeed at work?

Is this something that you can feel?

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<sup>7</sup> “ὑπερβάλλω,” BDAG, 1032.

<sup>8</sup> ESV Study Bible, s.v. Ephesians 1:19.

Is it something that can be measured?

Well, no it is not some special feeling that we have. We don't go around saying, I can feel the power of Christ's resurrection in me.

It is not a power that somehow we can use to our own advantage or to do amazing things that would dazzle other people.

But consider that Paul prays that we will know the exceeding greatness of this power.

And so we are to pray that God will help us to understand this power as we grow in relationship with Him.

We also must realize that this power is not just something we see individually.

The exceeding greatness of this power is first seen in Christ, in his resurrection and ascension, but we also see this power demonstrated as God builds His kingdom and His true church around the world.

This amazing power then is not just something we experience individually, but rather we especially see this power as God works throughout creation and in the Church in the advancement of His kingdom.

Sometimes on a cold day, you seemingly can barely feel the heat and the power of the sun.

But can you judge the power of the sun simply by what you feel or whether you can see it on a cloudy day?

Scientists tell us that the earth only receives about one two-billionth of the sun's total power.<sup>9</sup>

Each second the sun gives off more energy than 2 billion power plants can produce in one year.<sup>10</sup>

But who could understand this power if they judged it only by what they felt?

And so we must be careful not to judge the power of God that is at work in us simply by what we think or feel.

The assurance that God is working in His mighty power is the empty tomb, the resurrection of our Lord.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://hypertextbook.com/facts/1999/MatthewTsang.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.astronomynotes.com/starsun/s3.htm>

## CONCLUSION

**We must pray for others. We must pray according to God's truth and in great expectation of His power.**

Do you pray regularly and intentionally for others in this church and others you know?

Not that we pray a formula so that we get extra blessing.

Think of how your children ask you for things.

Do you give them what they need because they said the only acceptable phrase?

It is not that we have to make sure we have all the right words.

Scripture is the best pattern.

We do want to give our best as we pray even as we recognize the power is not in our own words.

It is God's power not our own power.

### *Communion and our text*

Thankfulness for God's work of grace.

Thankfulness for the Holy Spirit's work

We give thanks for eyes opened to see and know the truth.

We give thanks for the greatness of God's work of salvation.

Oh, may His work continue in each our lives, even using now this time for our good and strengthening.

### **Prayer**

**Closing Hymn: 357**

**Benediction: Hebrews 12:1-3**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.