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# Biblical Foundations for Spiritual Growth

Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21

*Pastor Russ Kennedy*

We are enjoying a season of growth. No, I am not talking about growth in our numbers, but growth in our maturity. Over the next four months we are going to look together at Ephesians once again. We want to think together about how to work out who we are as Christians in wise Christian living. Our aim is not establish some sort of New Covenant legalism. We want to help you think through how to take brief imperatives from the Scripture, connect them to who you are and how to live them out.

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. Here are prayers establishing the foundations for Christian growth.

How important it is that we link our prayer and petitions to God (v.15-23) with our praise of God (v.3-14). This text drives home the importance of prayer that prioritizes the spiritual.

Paul is praying for the believers that they will turn *who they are* into *how they live*. These two prayers are the connection between the great truths in Ephesians and the Christian life in Ephesians.

## **Prayer for Spiritual Perception**

**(Ephesians 1:15-23)**

The Christian life is grown through an increasing knowledge and understanding of God.

### **In What Marks the Christian Life**

**(v.15-16)**

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

The Christian life requires faith in God at its beginning and through its whole existence. To live pleasing to God you must believe in God. Christian obedience is how believing in God expresses itself. Where faith in God is growing, obedience to God will grow.

The Christian life expresses love for saints. To live pleasing to God you will express love for the saints. Most of the commands that we will be studying are governing relationships.

### **In Who Enables the Christian Life**

**(v.17-18)**

Real knowledge for Christian living comes through the work of the Spirit in our lives.

<sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> 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,

He gives SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION. This is the grace of the Spirit to show us God and His Word. It is the Spirit who gave the Word. It is the Spirit who grants us wisdom as we grow in knowing God.

We receive PERSONAL ENLIGHTENMENT. We are enabled to see what we are learning. The Spirit helps us to have the "aha" moment when we understand what the Word is saying.

We make PRACTICAL APPLICATION. We will grow in knowing God and His Word in a way that leads to wise obedience

## **In What must be Understood for the Christian Life (v.18-23)**

The Spirit is working in us to show us what actually is, not what ought to be.

<sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

### **God's Person (v.15-17)**

We will grow in our knowledge of God. Throughout our lives we will grow in knowing the Lord both factually and relationally. The Spirit is given and Paul is praying that this might be so.

### **Christ's Promise (v.18):**

We will grow in understanding the wonderful future God has promised to those he called. This hope, this amazing future, is what God called us to in our salvation. So we live now in view of God's promises about the future. The Christian life is a process of understanding and living this out.

### **Christ's Power (v.19-20a):**

We will grow to understand the incredible greatness of Christ's power. This power is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead. You will less and less depend on yourself and depend on Christ. His power will enable you to live as you ought.

### **Christ's Position (v.20b-23)**

We will grow in our understanding of Christ's exalted position. We will be gripped more and more by the centrality of Christ for all of life. Both of these phrases have enormous impact on how we live. We are more and more growing to understand the supremacy, sovereignty and sufficiency of Christ and therefore our submission to Him. If Christ is not exalted, then why should I submit to Him, particularly when it is hard to do so. This is one of the great failures of modern Christianity everywhere I go in the world. The push in many churches is to make Christ lowly, acceptable, like us. As a result our primary relationship with Him is not a father in a family or a king over the kingdom, but rather in terms of immediacy and intimacy

We will grow in our understanding of Christ's position in heaven (v.20b-21). He occupies the exalted place at the right hand of the Father himself. He is our King.

We will grow in our understanding of Christ's position on earth (v.22-23). He has been appointed head of the church. He is our groom and chief shepherd.

What is the point? God has given us His Spirit so that we may believe and know God in a way that leads to wise godly living.

## Prayer for Spiritual Power

(Ephesians 3:14-21)

The Christian life is grown through an increasing knowledge of God's love.

### In a Metaphor for the Christian Relationships

(v.14-15)

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

With humility, we take our place before our Father God. The point here is not to create a posture for praying but to call for a relationship with God. God is our Father God. We are to respect and reverence Him. Bowing before a father is a recognition of his place and position. God is Lord of the universe and Father of the family. He deserves our submission. Children are to obey their parents precisely because Christians are to obey their heavenly Father. Because Christians are to respect their heavenly Father, children are expected to respect and honor their parents as a life-long obligation.

In family, we take our place with our brothers and sisters. Now we have little difficulty with this idea until it comes to establishing which level of relationships is primary. I want to establish here as a theological truth, that the relationship between people as Christians is more fundamental and more primary than their human relationship. That you are brother and sister (or not) is the most important thing about your relationship with your spouse. As soon as my children publicly professed Christ through baptism, my relationship with them radically changed. They were first my brother or sister, then my son or daughter. This is a fundamental understanding that governs our life here as a corporate body of people. If this is new to you, then listen carefully through this series, because Michael and I will come back to this over and over again. In all your relationships, the FIRST and FUNDAMENTAL question is, "Is this person my brother or sister in Christ?" How we interact with them is primarily governed by the answer to that question.

Finally here is a note for Christians wrestling with deeper truths in the Bible. God is a family. There is a Father and a Son. This is the ultimate reality. God is not merely speaking in human terms or human relationships. The idea of being a human family comes from the fact that God is, in His trinity, a family. That we have families, fathers, spouses, sons and daughters is all derived from that ultimate Truth and Reality.

### In the Enablement for Christian Relationships

(v.16-19)

This prayer is one requests God's power to become who we are. We are not left to our own wisdom or strength to work all this out. This prayer is part of the transition from describing who we are in Christ to prescribing how we live in Christ. The focus is on the power to do so.

<sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This enablement for our walk with one another is described in parallel sections that look like this:

**By being spiritually enabled**

*To become who you are...*

Proportion - According to His glory

Power - Strengthened with power in the individual -

Product - Your hearts may be Christ's home -

**By being spiritually enlightened**

*To understand who you are...*

Prerequisite - Rooted in His love

Power - Strengthened to comprehend together with the community -

Product - Our church may be filled with God's fullness -

**In the Worship for Christian Relationships (v.20-21)**

Paul always ties together our walk and our worship. Worship is much more than our corporate gathered praise. It is about our whole walk with God and His people. Israel made the mistake that their corporate worship could be disconnected from their daily walk. This is never pleasing to God. What you do in this room is deeply overlapped with how you live through the week.

So watch then how Paul closes this prayer.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

**Its Foundation (v.20)**

God is able to cause us to become who we are even beyond our prayers or thoughts. He accomplishes this through the power of the Word and Spirit present in each of us and all of us together.

**Its Focus (v.21)**

God will be glorified through the church. But we also seek to glorify Him through the church. So there is assurance of it and the aspiration towards it. This is the Bible way. God will be glorified because His people do glorify Him.

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## Reflect and Respond

How much of your Christian life is focused on faith, hope and love? Over and over again, Paul highlights them as the core of the Christian life.

Christian obedience is the outflow of genuine belief. We are to live by faith. We do live by what we believe.

Christian obedience is the expression of genuine love. Without love, obedience becomes servile and legalistic. Having received love, we express our love through desiring to please the Lord and to serve others.

Christian obedience is the expectation of genuine hope. We live now in view of who we are and who we are becoming. So we obey the Lord because that is the shape of who we are in God's eyes now and will be in glory.

Is the resurrection power of Christ evident in your life? Or do you seem to be just barely getting through? Listen, brothers and sisters. God has granted you the very power of the resurrection life to live the Christian life. But you must believe it to be so. Everything in the Christian life comes to us through faith, through believing God's promises.

So then what you may need is the strength to see along with all the rest of God's people. Spiritual power and perception are community projects. We experience and express them together.

As we go through this series, we will be calling you over and over again to live in relationships where love is the foundation and pleasing God is the focus. Yes, we will be talking personally and practically and pointedly about *obedience*. If your faith and love are not producing obedience then they are *fake*. They are not real.

The aim of all obedience grounded in faith and love is the glory of God. Is your walk with God and His people bringing Him glory? May God bring that to pass as we learn to love and live with God's people by the power and for the praise of God.