

# God's Supreme Purpose

## Prayer for the Saints

*Ephesians 1:15-19*

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# Prayer for the Saints

## Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons on Ephesians 1 that I am calling, “God’s Supreme Purpose.”

In Ephesians 1:3-14, which is one, long, complex, glorious sentence in the original Greek, the Apostle Paul praised God for salvation. Paul praised the Father for planning our salvation, the Son for purchasing our salvation, and the Holy Spirit for applying that salvation to us.

In Ephesians 1:15-23, which is also one, long, complex, glorious sentence in the original Greek, the Apostle Paul prayed for the saints to grow in their understanding of, and appreciation for, the blessings of salvation.

Let’s read Paul’s prayer for the saints in Ephesians 1:15-19a:

**<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, <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, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. (Ephesians 1:15-19a)**

## Introduction

Dr. James Montgomery Boice writes,

If God is in charge of everything and has “foreordained whatsoever comes to pass” – in the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism – what is the point of praying? In fact, what is

the point of doing anything? Why witness? Why study the Bible? Why do good works? If what is going to happen is going to happen anyway, none of these things count. We might as well do as we please and let God do what he wants.<sup>1</sup>

The answer to these questions is that although God is sovereign and has indeed “foreordained whatsoever comes to pass,” he nevertheless uses *means* to accomplish his purposes. That is, God uses the *means* of Scripture reading, prayer, witnessing, serving, and so on to accomplish his purposes. The astonishing thing is that God uses fallen human beings to accomplish his purposes!

This truth is taught most clearly in Ephesians 1. The Apostle Paul clearly taught the sovereignty of God in our salvation in the first half of the chapter. He could not have been clearer about God the Father planning our salvation by electing a vast number to salvation, the Son purchasing our salvation by his life, death, burial, and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit applying the blessings of salvation to the elect.

In the second half of the chapter the Apostle Paul stressed the importance of prayer so that believers would fully understand and appreciate the blessings of salvation.

## Lesson

Paul’s prayer for the saints in Ephesians 1:15-19 shows us how to praise and petition God for believers.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Praise God for Believers (1:15-16)
2. Petition God for Believers (1:17-19a)

### I. Praise God for Believers (1:15-16)

First, Paul’s prayer for the saints shows us how to praise God

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 33.

for believers.

In Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul had just outlined one of the most magnificent statements regarding God's plan of salvation. It is a magnificent statement of praise to God. Now, in the second half of chapter 1 Paul turned to prayer. He said to the Ephesians in verses 15-16, **“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”**

Paul had ministered in Ephesus years earlier, and the congregation had changed some in his absence. Nevertheless, he praised God for the believers there and did **not cease to give thanks for them, remembering them in his prayers.**

Paul's praise to God for believers included two noteworthy features.

*A. Paul Praise God for Their Faith (1:15a)*

First, Paul praised God for their faith.

Paul said in verse 15a, **“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus.”** Paul thanked God for their *saving faith*. They had been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It was a marvelous work of God in which each Person of the Trinity played a significant and essential role.

But it seems that the Apostle Paul had heard more than just about their saving faith. He had heard about their *practical faith*. That is, the believers in Ephesus lived out their faith in their everyday lives. They did not merely profess faith in Christ with their lips; they expressed their faith in Christ by their lives. Theirs was a robust, working, living faith. As Kent Hughes said,

The Ephesians believed Christ would take care of them through thick and thin. Their faith was not like the man who was attempting to cross the frozen St. Lawrence River in Canada. Not

sure whether the ice would hold, the man first tested it by laying one hand on it. Then he got down on his knees and gingerly began making his way across. When he got to the middle of the frozen river trembling with fear, he heard a noise behind him. Looking back, to his horror he saw a team of horses pulling a carriage down the road toward the river. And upon reaching the river they didn't stop, but bolted right onto the ice and past him, while he crouched there on all fours, turning a deep crimson. If only he had known how firm the ice really was that day ... The Ephesians knew Christ had saved them and could hold them up, and as a result they were charging straight ahead. For this, Paul thanked God.<sup>2</sup>

B. *Paul Praise God for Their Love (1:15b)*

And second, Paul praised God for their love.

Paul also said in verse 15b, “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus **and your love toward all the saints.**” The believers in Ephesus had been transformed by the gospel. Their lives were radically changed so that they were also characterized by **love**. And it is significant that their love was **toward all the saints**. They loved **all** Christians.

The reason that is striking is because that is not always true, is it? Oh, we say that we love **all the saints**, but we disagree with each other, we disengage, and we move away.

But the Ephesians did not do that. The word Paul used for their love is the Greek word *agape*, which is a thoughtful, intentional, purposeful love that wills to love even the unlovely – the very love of God himself. Kent Hughes writes:

The Ephesians had this love in their hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), and they chose to exercise it toward one another. The attitude among the Ephesians was, “my life for your life.” I once saw a picture of Hell. It showed

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<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 48–50.

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several obviously selfish, unhappy people seated around a table for a meal. Each held a long-handled spoon with which it was impossible to feed themselves – they could only feed each other. But no one was willing to do that. Of course, that meal was “Hell.” There was none of this in Ephesus.<sup>3</sup>

Believers look out for each other. They bear one another's burdens. They encourage one another. They serve one another. They love one another. They put Jesus' commandment into visible practice in their daily lives, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35).

So, Paul praised God for the faith and love of the Ephesians. John Calvin said, “Observe here, that under *faith and love* Paul includes generally the whole excellence of Christian character.”<sup>4</sup> These are two vital characteristics that mark every Christian, and they should grow in every Christian.

Let us praise God for the faith and love that we see in others. Let us delight to see believers with a practical faith that is a robust, working, living faith that grows in the knowledge and grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And let us delight to see believers with a love that is toward *all* the saints, that looks out for others, bears one another's burdens, encourages one another, and serves one another.

So, Paul's prayer for the saints shows us how to praise God for believers.

## II. Petition God for Believers (1:17-19a)

And second, Paul's prayer for the saints shows us how to

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 50.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 211.

petition God for believers.

There are two main petitions in Paul's prayer.

*A. To Know God Better (1:17)*

The first petition for believers is to know God better.

Paul prayed in verse 17, “. . . **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.**” The *New International Version* of the Bible makes it clearer that the first petition is for believers to know God better, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, *so that you may know him better.*”

The most important need for every Christian is to know God better. My New Testament professor, D. A. Carson asks, “What is the greatest need in the church today?” His answer is as follows, “The one thing we need in Western Christendom is a deeper knowledge of God. We need to know God better.”<sup>5</sup> Years ago, Dr. James Boice gave the same answer. He wrote:

Some years ago, I was in a question-and-answer session following a meeting of the post-college group at Tenth Presbyterian Church, and I was asked, “Dr. Boice, what do you think is the greatest lack among evangelical Christians in America today?” It was the first time I had been asked that question, but it was asked at a timely moment. I had been doing work on the attributes of God and had this in mind. So, although at an earlier period in my ministry I might have said, “To be faithful to the teachings of Scripture, to show love for one another,” or some such thing, in this case I replied, “I think that the greatest need of the evangelical church today is for professing Christians really to know God.” My opinion has not changed in the years since.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

<sup>6</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*, 34.

Every Christian needs to know God better. Paul said that his goal was to “know him and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). If that was true of the Apostle Paul, how much more does that need to be true of us. The goal of every Christian should be to know God and make him known to others.

The incomparable Baptist preacher in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once wrote, “I go back to my home, many a time, mourning that I cannot preach my Master even as I myself know Him, and what I know of Him is very little compared with the matchlessness of His grace. Would that I knew more of Him, and that I could tell it out better!”<sup>7</sup>

Well, how does one know God better? J. I. Packer wrote a magnificent book called *Knowing God*. He said that there are four characteristics of believers who know God: “Those who know God have great energy for God... great thoughts of God... great boldness for God... great contentment in God.”<sup>8</sup>

Let us petition God to know him better. Let us ask God to grant us great energy for him, great thoughts of him, great boldness for him, and great contentment in him.

So, the first petition for believers is to know God better.

*B. To Know the Blessings of the Gospel Better (1:18-19a)*

And the second petition for believers is to know the blessings of the gospel better.

Paul mentioned three specific blessings.

1. The Blessing of Hope (1:18a)

The first blessing of the gospel is hope.

Paul prayed in verse 18a, “. . . **having the eyes of your**

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

<sup>8</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), n.p.



**hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.**” Paul linked the word **“hope”** to the word **“called.”** Paul was saying that God has **called** believers to something and for something. Earlier, Paul said that God chose believers to “be holy and blameless before him” (1:4), “for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” (1:5), and “to the praise of his glory” (1:12). The **hope** to which God has **called** us is that God has made us part of his family, is preparing us to be with him in heaven for all eternity, and making us like his Son, Jesus Christ.

Once we understand the **hope** to which we have been **called**, it will transform the way we look at the world. It will transform the way we look at ourselves, and it will transform the way we look at other believers.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that a good story is told in connection with Philip Henry, the father of Matthew Henry the Commentator. He and a certain young lady had fallen in love with each other. She belonged to a “higher” circle of society than he did, but the young lady had become a Christian, and therefore social standing no longer counted with her or constituted any kind of obstacle to their marriage. Her parents, however, were not pleased, and expostulating with her they said, “This man Philip Henry, where has he come from?”

To which she gave the immortal reply, “I don’t know where he has come from, but I know where he is going.”

And then Lloyd-Jones makes the following application:

We love the saints because we know where they are going. They and we are marching together to Zion. We belong to the same Father, to the same household, to the same family; we are going to the same home and we know it. Some of us are very difficult, and very trying, and very unworthy; but, thank God, because we are God’s children we are travelling together towards our heavenly home; and we know that the day will come when all our faults and blemishes and spots and wrinkles will disappear and

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we shall all be glorified and perfected together, enjoying the same glorious eternity.<sup>9</sup>

### 2. The Blessing of Riches (1:18b)

The second blessing of the gospel is riches.

Paul said in verse 18b, “. . . **what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.**” Paul wanted believers to see that *we* are God's riches! We are **the riches of his** [that is, God's] **glorious inheritance!**

That is an astonishing thought! God, who is the sovereign creator of all the multitudinous galaxies, wants us to know that *we* are his riches, his treasure, his prized possession!

### 3. The Blessing of Power (1:19a)

And the third blessing of the gospel is power.

Paul said in verse 19a, “. . . **and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.**” Commentator John Stott says that “if God's ‘call’ looks back to the beginning, and God's ‘riches’ looks on to the end, then surely God's ‘power’ spans the interim period in between.”<sup>10</sup> God has blessed believers with incredible blessings. He has provided everything necessary for godly living in the present age. Paul described the power that God gives to believers to live for him in verses 20-21. That power is what “he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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.”

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<sup>9</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 324.

<sup>10</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 57.

How do we experience that power in our lives? If we are to know God's power in our lives, we must spend time getting to know God better. There is no shortcut to knowing God better.

Harry Ironside tells of meeting a very godly man early in his ministry. The man was dying of tuberculosis, and Ironside had gone to visit him. His name was Andrew Fraser. He could barely speak above a whisper. His lungs were almost gone. Yet he said, "Young man, you are trying to preach Christ, are you not?"

"Yes, I am," replied Ironside.

"Well," he said, "sit down a little, and let us talk together about the Word of God." He opened his Bible, and until his strength was gone he opened up one passage after another, teaching truths that Ironside at that time had never seen or appreciated. Before long tears were running down Ironside's cheeks, and he asked, "Where did you get these things? Can you tell me where I can find a book that will open them up to me? Did you get them in a seminary or college?"

Fraser replied, "My dear young man, I learned these things on my knees on the mud floor of a little sod cottage in the north of Ireland. There with my open Bible before me, I used to kneel for hours at a time and ask the Spirit of God to reveal Christ to my soul and to open the Word to my heart, and he taught me more on my knees on that mud floor than I ever could have learned in all the seminaries or colleges in the world."<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

There is the secret. It is not a secret formula. It is not great intelligence. It is not academic degrees. It is time spent with God.

May God help us to know him better and the blessings of the gospel better as well. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 38.

## **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
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