



Ephesians

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...do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:
Ephesians 1:16

It is common to Paul's letters to have such a statement, or a part of such a statement, included in the early portion of them. In some letters, the stress is on the thanks, in others is it on the prayers. The letter to the Galatians noticeably skips over this general sentiment though. He had greater concerns with them.

With the Ephesians, he notes that he does not "cease to give thanks for" them. He was far distant from them and knew that he may never see them again, but he could communicate with them and hear of their continued faith in the Lord. The previous verse noted that he had heard of their "faith in the Lord Jesus and [their] love for all the saints" and he was overjoyed at this. The knowledge of their steadfastly holding to the gospel which had been presented to them was a source of joy and elation, leading to constant thanks.

But more than just thanks, he tells them of his "making mention of" them in his prayers. He not only thanked God for their current state, but he also petitioned God for this to continue, for them to be strengthened and emboldened in their walk, to be protected and safe from the wiles of the devil, and to be comforted in their trials and tribulations.

He uses the same term, "making mention," in both Romans 1:9 and Philemon 1:4. Paul was a faithful friend and a heartfelt prayer partner for those he so loved. As far as this

constant thanks and prayer he mentioned, there is no reason to not believe it, just as he says it.

This doesn't mean that Paul got on his knees, closed his eyes, and continued to be in thanks and prayer with the exception of taking time to eat or sleep. Rather, as he worked, as he walked, as he contemplated the many fruits of his labors, he took the time to thank God and pray for those he was so intimately connect to. It is reflective of his own admonition to those in Thessalonica to "pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Later in this epistle, he will speak of spiritual warfare in great detail. He knew that a part of that warfare was to continue in praise to God, and also to continue in petition to Him. In particular, see verse 6:18 concerning this.

Life application: Even though God already knows the end from the beginning, and even though the plan is complete in His mind, this should not lead us to a fatalistic view of life where prayers are ignored. Rather, our prayers are figured into the plan, just as our free-will calling on Jesus is figured into the plan. If we don't receive Jesus, we will not be saved. Likewise, prayers that are unuttered can never be heard. God's foreknowledge of all things outside of time factor in our actions within the stream of time. Pray!

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, Ephesians 1:17

The wording in this verse is rich in Christological significance. In the previous verse, Paul said that he did not cease to give thanks for the Ephesians, making mention of them in his prayers. Now he explains what the substance of those prayers are. They form a prayer that is beautifully worded and suitable for use by anyone who yearns for the rich understanding of the work of Christ.

He begins with "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ..." The prayer is directed to God the Father. It is thus a reference to the humanity of Christ as our Mediator to God the Father, while at the same time it highlights Christ's deity. As God is infinite, and as we are finite, there is an infinite gap between the two. Christ Jesus is the bridge between us. He is finite in His humanity, and yet He is infinite in His deity. He is the One to carry our prayers across that infinite divide, and He is the One to bring the answer to those prayers back into our finite realm. Such is the mediatorial role of Christ between the perfect and infinitely holy Creator and His fallen creatures.

After this, he calls Him “the Father of glory.” However, the English fails to include an important definite article. Young’s Literal Translation rightly says –

“...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of the glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the recognition of him,” YLT

The words are “the Father of the glory.” This is speaking not of the glory of the Father which is unseen, but the glory of Christ which is seen. The glory of God the Father is revealed through God the Son. In the Old Testament, it was the glory of the Lord, YHVH, that was seen. Jesus is the Incarnation of YHVH. This can be substantiated by referring to Acts 7 where the same term “the glory” is used by Stephen –

And he said, “Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran...” This is found in Genesis 12:1 and it is speaking of the Lord. It is the same Lord who appeared to Abraham at other times, including in human form just prior to the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 18:1. In the New Testament, this “glory” was revealed to us in the Person of Jesus –

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

It is this “Father of the glory,” meaning the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Paul petitions. His prayer is that He “may give to [them] the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.” The term “spirit” here, according to the scholar Alford, “is neither exclusively the Holy Spirit nor the spirit of man, but the complex idea of the spirit of man dwelt in and moved by the Spirit of God.” This is correct.

The prophets and apostles used their own knowledge as they wrote, and yet their writings also reflect the working of the Holy Spirit in them. Although our thoughts and words are not inspired and thus to be considered as scriptural, Paul is asking that the same moving of the Spirit will work in our spirit to reveal to us the truths which are laid out in Scripture. The work of the prophets and apostles was for the writing of Scripture; the use of those Scriptures are for our understanding of what has been written.

In this spiritual working, Paul asks that it be directed to “wisdom.” This is the gift of knowing what is sound and proper in the interpretation of God’s word. One can read Scripture and misapply its contents. This is not wise. Wisdom is found in fearing God and cherishing the right application of His word. “Revelation” is the actual grasping of what God has placed in His word. One might say, “Give me the wisdom to see your words

revealed to me.” This revelation that Paul speaks of is “in the knowledge of Him.” It is asking that we be able to peer into the very heart of Scripture to see Christ revealed. In doing so, we see God the Father revealed, because it is Christ who reveals Him to us.

This is the beginning of Paul’s petition for the Ephesians (and thus us!) as he writes his words to them.

Life application: We cannot know God without knowing Jesus Christ. We cannot know Jesus Christ without knowing the source of instruction on who He is, which is the Holy Bible. Therefore, we cannot know God without knowing our Bible. Let us handle this precious gift carefully, looking for God to reveal Himself to us through it.

...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
Ephesians 1:18

The first clause is really dependent on the previous verse. Taken together the two say, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...”

This then is the continued prayer of Paul which is being expressed in words. The first clause reads that, “...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.” The Greek actually says, “the eyes of your heart.” The heart is considered the seat of understanding and the place from which wisdom is derived. This is especially true with spiritual understanding. It encompasses the totality of the inner man.

Paul’s prayer is that understanding would flow into them and fill them. And this filling has a specific purpose. It is so “that you may know what is the hope of His calling.” This is the calling of God in Christ that carries with it a specific hope. The “hope” he speaks of is not referring to something “hoped for” as if it is yet to be attained. Rather, it is the result of our redemption through Christ Jesus.

Paul is now, as he will be throughout this epistle, speaking of “heavenly” things. The “hope of His calling” speaks of our eternal inheritance in Christ. It is already secured based on our belief in Christ, even if it is not yet actuated. The reason for understanding this now (as his prayer desires for them), is so that in this world of trouble, we can look beyond the moment to the greater world, the world of glory, which lies ahead. This is

revealed in the next clause which speaks of “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

In the Greek of this clause alone, there are eight words in the genitive case. A genitive is a word “relating to or denoting a case of nouns and pronouns (and words in grammatical agreement with them) indicating possession or close association.” The abundance of genitives shows that, “Glory is the essential characteristic of salvation, and this glory is richly abounding. His inheritance: which is His, and His gift” (Vincent’s Word Studies).

This is what we now possess, completely and forever. It can never be taken from us as it was given to us with a pledge (see verses 1:13, 14). For this reason, we can walk in this world of woe and have confidence that no matter what happens, our inheritance is secure and it is glorious. The riches of what lie ahead are ours now, and so nothing should make us falter in our walk with Christ. No matter what force of evil comes against us, greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.

Life application: As the world continues to devolve into wickedness, let our hearts not be troubled. Should we be faced with the horrifying demand of renouncing Christ or losing our lives, let us have the faith of the saints of ages past and say, “Nice try devil, but no thanks! I have a sure hope and calling which will see you cast into the Lake of Fire as I sit, watching from a heavenly setting.”

...and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power... Ephesians 1:19

Paul continues his prayer here for the saints in Ephesus (and thus us!) concerning the opening of the eyes of our hearts to the magnificence of what Christ has done for us. In this verse, he continues with his use of superlatives, beginning with the words, “and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power.”

The Greek words for “exceeding greatness” are used to describe what Paul actually cannot describe. He uses pen and ink in a struggle with the thoughts of his mind to relay to us the immense magnitude of the greatness of what God has done for us. It is this which is now revealed though the mystery of Christ. His words further disclose to us the grandeur of the riches of God’s divine grace which is working toward us.

The Pulpit Commentary states that, “The whole energy of the Divine Being is turned on to our feeble, languid nature, vivifying, purifying, and transforming it, making it

wonderfully active where all was feebleness before, as the turning on of steam suddenly wakens up a whole mass of inert machinery.”

Paul then notes that this immense working of God is “toward us who believe.” We are the objects of God’s marvelous workings in the stream of time and human existence into which Christ stepped. The actual workings will be described in the next verses, but in order to show us the spectacular nature of them, we are given the matchless words of this verse now.

To complete this preparatory thought, he says that this exceeding greatness of God’s power, which is directed towards us as believers, is “according to the working of His mighty power.” Vincent’s Word Studies notes that the words “His mighty power” are insufficient to translate the Greek. Rather it should be “the strength of His might.” The word for “strength” is a word used only of God which denotes both “relative and manifested power.” The word “might” refers to “indwelling strength.” And the word “working” denotes “the active, efficient manifestation of these.”

Taken together they reveal more than just a latent “power,” but rather an active working of God which is connected to the words “exceeding greatness of His power” of the preceding clause. As Vincent’s states, “The magnitude of God’s power toward believers is known in the operation of the strength of His might.” As you can see, Paul’s words are very carefully used to reveal to our minds the opulence of God’s mighty power working towards us. As stated, the actual use of this power is yet to be described. Paul will list it as he continues to show us the greatness of what God has done in and through Christ the Lord.

Life application: If Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, struggled with just the right terminology to describe the glorious workings of God in Christ, then we should be attentive to these nuances and contemplate them when they are explained to us. In this, we can then truly begin to state what our minds have begun to grasp - “How great Thou art, O God.”