

Ephesians Bible Study

Lesson 5 Notes/ Ephesians 1:15-23

The Apostle's Great Concern

If someone were to ask you what your greatest need in the Christian life is, do you know what you would say? In our verses for today, Paul addresses this very question as he moves from the marvelous description of what God has done in salvation, to a prayer for those who have received God's grace. In verses 15-23 we see, as it were, a window into the apostle's heart, where he reveals his chief concern for those he had so earnestly invested in, reflected in his endless petitions to the Father on their behalf. So, what was this great concern that kept Paul on his knees? And how does this apply to us today? Simply stated Paul wanted his beloved to truly come to know God intimately, to keep moving forward in their walk with Christ, and to come to understand the richness of their new identity. While he was certain of the genuineness of these believers' faith, and rejoiced in that fact, he knew they were only at the beginning of their journey with the Lord. As Martin Lloyd Jones explains, *"Conversion is not the end, it is merely the beginning; it is only the first step. It is comparable to birth. A child's birth is not the end, it is the beginning of his life; and regeneration and conversion is its spiritual counterpart. It is because Paul knows this and is aware of the tremendous possibilities that lie ahead of these people, that the apostle prays for them."*

The Start of Knowing God: Saving Faith's Proof

Beginning in verse 15 we read, ***"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."*** Here we see Paul's heart's naturally flowing to gratitude and intercession for his beloved church family, as he reflects on the great purposes of God in Christ (vs 3-14), and how that was playing out in the lives of those he loved. These believers had come to have a sincere testimony of faith, evidenced first by the fact that they had not only received Christ as Savior, but also as Lord. The Greek word for Lord used here is *kurios* which means *"the one having supreme authority and power over all,"* making it clear that the believers had come to receive Christ as He truly is. (John 17:1-3) The emphasis Paul makes here is notable, but also in keeping with the entire New Testament. Saving belief always affirms Christ as Savior and Lord, and any who try to separate his nature are deceived. Jesus is either both or he is neither. (Matt. 28:19) In Acts we read, ***"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*** In I Cor 12:3 we learn that only those who have the Holy Spirit can say ***"Jesus is Lord,"*** and actually live in such a way that reflects that belief. Of course, no person at salvation has a full understanding of all it means to follow Jesus as Lord, but the Scriptures are clear that genuine believers have a willingness to submit to Christ's rule, and have in fact counted the cost and left their former life of self-rule to follow the Master, Jesus Christ. (Luke 14:25-33, Matt. 10:37-39, Luke 9:57-62)

Going further, Paul thanks God for the love that these believers had come to be marked by; a love that was demonstrated in selfless sacrifice toward their brothers and sisters in Christ. While love for those in the body of Christ is never to be to the exclusion of love for the lost, genuine Christianity at its core affirms the truth that believers love believers. This is because God has placed His love in their hearts, and it is in fact a mark of the Holy Spirit. I John 3:14 speaks of this when it says, ***“We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”*** These straightforward words do not eliminate the internal struggle that exists in the heart of the elect to put the love they possess into action. Putting off the flesh is a life-long process, and putting on love is a choice to be made daily. But the point is that genuine Christians are compelled to love because of the love God has shown them, (2 Cor. 5:14-15) and in the case of the believers at Ephesus (and beyond: see Lesson 1)) this was indeed happening. For this Paul rejoiced and endlessly praised God!

The Means of Knowing God: Through Wisdom, Revelation, and Illumination

Following Paul’s expression of thanksgiving to the Lord, he then proceeds to reveal the deepest concerns of his heart as he prays, ***“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened...”*** At the beginning of these words we see that the petition is not only directed to God the Father but is centered on God the Father. The Greek word for *knowledge* used here is *epignosis* which is the strongest, most powerful term Paul could have used to convey the idea. He is praying that the believers would grow to have an intimate, relational knowledge of God; a life of real fellowship that went beyond just an intellectual understanding of the truth. To state it simply, Paul was praying that God would become real and personal to them, so much so that they would become conscious of His glory and presence at all times.

It is important to remember that the believers Paul was praying for were already saved and known for the genuineness of their faith. Yet even so, Paul’s prayer reflects that they still had a great need to grow, just as we all do, and this growth was first and foremost to be centered on knowing God more. Interestingly, this knowledge he was praying for could only be experienced as it was granted by God Himself, in a ***“spirit of wisdom and revelation,”*** meaning they needed the Holy Spirit to impart to their human spirit ***“the fullness of godly knowledge and understanding which their sanctified human mind was capable of understanding.”*** (MacArthur) While they already possessed the Holy Spirit and all of the blessings of belonging to God, they had a great need for God to reveal the fullness of their inheritance to them, which flowed through their relationship with the Lord and the truth of the Word.

Paul also prayed that ***“the eyes of their heart would be enlightened,”*** meaning that he was petitioning God to illumine their mind so that they could grasp the truth and come to have their whole person governed by the Spirit. He had experienced first-hand the great tragedy that happens when the mind is governed by the emotions rather than the Spirit. (2 Cor. 6:11-13) In his dealings with the church at Corinth, he had told the believers there that, in effect, the reason they were nearly incapable of receiving truth was because their fleshly emotions were

dominating them, rather than the Spirit. This grieved Paul's heart, for he knew that there was so much more God could reveal to them, if only they weren't so fleshly and full of worldly affections. It is hard to imagine that this experience was ever far from the Paul's mind. His pastoral heart longed for those under his care to live a life of spiritual maturity, and the only way this could happen was for God's truth to be in the "driver's seat" of their lives as it were, leading and guiding them into a deeper relationship with God through the Spirit. This is why we see in all the Pauline prayers a strong emphasis from the Apostle on godly knowledge and understanding, and a constant focus on man's primary need: health in his relationship with Almighty God. (Phil. 1:9-11, Col. 1:9-14, Eph. 1:15-23, 2:14-19)

The Particulars of Knowing God: Hope, Power, and the Preeminence of Christ

Hope

Flowing out of his request for enlightenment Paul prays for the believers to ***"know the hope to which He has called you,"*** and ***"what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints."*** Here we see Paul clearly wanting them to understand *relationally* much of what he has already instructed them in, in previous verses. So, what was the nature of the calling Paul was referring to? Simply put, the apostle was reminding them that their calling was based solely in God - His character, His initiative and His plan. Additionally, if we look at the whole of Scripture we can see God's calling of the elect described in three main ways: in the past God had effectually called them to Himself, resulting in their salvation (Rom. 8:30, 2 Tim. 1:9); in the present God had called and equipped them for a lifetime of loving sacrifice and service (1 Peter 2:21, Eph. 4:1); and for the future God had called them to Himself to be co-heirs with Christ! (Rom. 8:17, Eph. 4:4) All of this boiled down to the idea that they truly had been given a rich and glorious inheritance in Christ; it was absolutely secure because of the nature of the One who had promised it, and even as they awaited their eternal reward, they could have purpose and meaning in the present. Summing up these ideas Martin Lloyd Jones said it this way, *"If you are a saint, if you are one of God's holy people, you are going to this glory...and nothing can prevent that from happening. Do you know you are a saint? Are you certain you are one of God's holy people? Make certain of it. Then, having made certain of it, dwell upon it, apply your mind to it, read the Scriptures, delve into them, commit them to memory, repeat them daily. Say to yourself, 'That is what I am destined for, that is the inheritance which has been prepared for me, that is how I am going to spend my eternity... and pray God by His Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of your understanding so that these things may become real to you; so that you shall not spend all your time thinking about this world and this passing life, but rather about that which is coming for certain, and which is so glorious."*

Power

Following Paul's petition to God for illumination in the realm of their hope and inheritance, the apostle prays for the believers to truly grasp ***"what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might***

that He worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly places..." The Greek word for power that Paul uses is "*dunamos*," meaning strength, power, or ability; yet going further it is often used in Scripture with reference to a miraculous power or marvelous work. This is the way it is used here. God's power was shown *"toward us"* when he *"made us alive together with Christ,"* even when we were *"dead in our trespasses and sins."* (Eph. 2:5) We are truly *"God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:10) from start to finish. We are assured in Phil 1:6 that *"He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion in Christ Jesus,"* and this is all because of the miraculous and *"immeasurably great"* power of God working in accordance with the great love of God. Paul longed for those he loved to experience this as real and assured, and to know that this same power was available to them in their daily lives through the Holy Spirit. Summing up this idea MacArthur says it this way, *"At times we are tempted to doubt, to wonder if God can do a certain thing for us or through us or ultimately bring us into His presence. But when we look back at what He brought about in Christ, at what He faithfully accomplished on behalf of His Son - and at His assurance that He will just as faithfully accomplish His work on our behalf ... what ground do we have for doubting? In light of such assurance, how can a Christian feel insecure, forsaken, or powerless? The same unlimited divine power that raised Him from the dead, will raise us from the dead, and the same power that seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places will seat us there with Him. In the meanwhile, the resurrection power is at our disposal for living for His glory."*

Preeminence of Christ

Finally, Paul moves from God's power to a glorious description of the preemptive nature of the Lord Jesus Christ as he proclaims of His Son, *"far above all rule and all authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but in the one to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."* Here we see Paul using multiple superlatives to describe the authoritative majesty of His Son, the very Person who lives inside believers. He is saying in essence, "Remember the nature of the One who saved you and now lives inside of you! Fix your gaze on Him!" For every believer, in every time, this focus is what truly brings perspective and transformation. Speaking of this reality, Paul said in 2 Cor. 3:17-18, *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."* As believers conscientiously take the time to set aside their worldly concerns, and simply focus on the Lord of glory, they will find that the Holy Spirit will enable them to have a more God-centered and correct understanding of this life. They will also find that God will change them, for anytime men truly behold Christ, transformation occurs. As MacArthur says *"When we look at Him, our physical problems, and even our spiritual problems, will not loom so all-important before us. We not only will be better able to see our problems as they really are, but will then, and only then, have the right motivation and power to work them out."* Paul knew this truth better than most, and expressed

it eloquently when he said, ***“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.”*** He knew that in knowing Christ, and truly fellowshiping with His Lord, all of the difficult circumstances he faced would only serve to deepen that relationship and make him more Christ-like in the end. And this Christ-likeness was seen by Paul as the ultimate prize to gain, regardless of the personal cost involved. (Phil. 3:14)

As for the church at Ephesus, these words regarding Christ’s authoritative majesty had to have been an especially appropriate reminder. Because of the culture they lived in, and the ongoing fascination many still had with the occult and magic, Paul’s reminder that Christ has authority over *all* things, was meant to encourage them to remain resolute in their allegiance to the Lord. Truly, God had given Christ to them as an incomparable inheritance, and by embracing their new identity in Him, they would find the capacity to display His glory to the lost world that surrounded them.

Application

Finally, in light of the truths contained in this magnificent prayer of Paul, the question that remains is , “How do these truths apply to my life? Are there specific ways God is calling me to change in the area of my prayer life, my view of God, or my view of others?” While the Holy Spirit has a myriad of ways that He leads us in the application of truth, the main principle of this passage should not be missed: The central focus of God honoring prayer has as its focus a deep desire for the beloved to truly come to know God more, to experience Him relationally, and to come to understand what the true Christian identity is really all about. Clearly, Paul understood this well, and while he prayed for the church at Ephesus, the Holy Spirit spoke through Him in a mighty way, revealing to countless believers throughout all the centuries what the highest priorities of God are for his people. While it is very easy to focus on more trivial matters when it comes to our personal faith and prayers, aligning ourselves with the heart of God will always prove to bear the most fruit in our lives, and in the lives of others. (I John 5:14-15)

References

1. D. Martin Lloyd Jones, God’s Ultimate Purpose- an Exposition from Ephesians
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3. John Macarthur, The New Testament Commentary, Ephesians
4. Macarthur Bible Study- Ephesians- Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ
5. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance
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