

Northolt Park Baptist Church

Praying for the Church: Ephesians 1:15-23

There are few things worth noting before we get to the prayer itself. Notice first how it starts – 1:15 – ‘for this reason’. For *what* reason? To answer that we look at what Paul has just said. He begins in 1:3 by saying that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, and he lays out those blessings like an amazing array of presents, just as a child might do at Christmas: he says we are chosen, loved, redeemed, adopted, given hope, marked with the Spirit. Then comes 1:15: *for this reason*. Because of all the great things God has done, Paul responds in prayer. I wonder, is that what we do – respond in prayerfulness for the great things God has done?

But notice what else Paul says in 1:15-16. He *thanks* God for them. He thinks about their faith and love and he responds in thankfulness. Truth be known, it’s probably easier to spend more time *complaining* about believers than being thankful for them! But Paul consistently gives thanks, even when things aren’t quite right in the church. Even when things aren’t on an even keel, we can give thanks; even when we rub each other up the wrong way and irritate one other, we can give thanks; even when people don’t do things the way we would like them to be done, we can give thanks. We can think about our brothers’ faith, and think about our sisters’ love, and give thanks. Paul’s prayer arises out of his *thankfulness* to God for people. And then the prayer follows, where he prays for certain things. Let’s have a look at these...

1. The understanding God gives to us (1:17)

Notice firstly *who* Paul prays to – 1:17a – he prays to the God of Jesus, the Father. And notice secondly *what* he prays for – 1:17b – he prays for more of the Holy Spirit. And notice thirdly *why* Paul prays for this – 1:17c – he prays this so they might know God better.

Paul prays for wisdom and revelation from the Spirit. They have already received the Spirit,

as Paul has said earlier in 1:13-14, and now Paul prays that the Spirit’s work would be continued in their hearts, in giving them wisdom and understanding. Why? So that they may know God better. It’s possible for us to know God, and it’s possible for us to know God better – not informational knowledge *about* God, but *relational* knowledge *with* God. It’s not *what* we know, but *who* we know.

You might have a sports hero – a footballer, or a tennis player, or a hero from the world of music or film. You know lots *about* them, their life-story, perhaps, and the statistics of all their achievements, but you don’t know them *personally*, and they don’t know you. But this knowledge of God is different: it’s about knowing almighty God himself! Do we *really* know this God? And if we do know God, do we want to know him better?

Wherever we are in our Christian walk, there can still be growth in knowledge: new blessings from God; new depths in our relationship with him; new appreciation of his grace and love; a new sense of his commitment to us.

We can *always* pray that for ourselves and others. It is *always* God’s will that we know him better. That can shape our prayers for ourselves and for others. It’s not always clear whether I should pray for miraculous healing for very sick and elderly relatives and friends, or whether I should pray that my children will grow up to be really successful and have great jobs. But whatever the details of our lives are, we can be sure that through them all God wants us to know him better. Let’s pray for a deeper knowledge of God.

Paul then develops the theme of knowing in 1:18-19 with the next things he prays for. He prays for enlightenment about particular things. What things?

2. The hope to which God calls us (1:18)

This is found in the middle part of verse 18. God has called us to a hope. Hope is the experience of looking forward to the future, expecting that it holds something positive. The Austrian psychologist, Victor Frankl, who spent time in a Nazi concentration camp said that what made the difference to the survival of inmates was not physical strength or great resourcefulness, but *hope*. When people lost hope, they gave up. So far as the Bible is concerned, hope is not a vague feeling that things *might* turn out alright, but a concrete, certain hope that things *will* turn out alright. It's a solid hope that God's in charge and is leading us somewhere. Let's pray that God will show us the hope of our calling.

3. The value God places on us (1:18)

The reference to 'inheritance' (in the last part of 1:18) could refer to heaven. But it could also be about what we are to God: we are *his* inheritance. Israel is sometimes described this way in the Old Testament, as 'the people he chose for his inheritance'. Paul transfers that idea to the *church*, to say that we are God's chosen inheritance, and he adds the words 'riches' and 'glory' to describe how valuable it is. We are God's inheritance, which means he places extraordinary value on us. Just as we can lack a certain element of hope in our lives, so also we can lack a certain sense of worth. God values us, he has invested in us, and he has made us part of his inheritance. Paul prays that God will make it clear to the Ephesians how precious they are to him. Let's pray that for each other too.

4. The power God works in us (1:19-23)

Paul prays that they will know power (1:19a). God is not a feeble lesser god, sharing our pain but not able to do anything about it. He is all powerful, and his power is at work in us! Take a look at what Paul says about God's power in 1:19b-23. The power of God at work in us is the same power that raised Christ from death, that enthroned Jesus above every power, and which is now exercised for the good of Jesus' church.

Some commentators on sports events say that you can tell from the way a particular team walked out that they were going to lose. Some teams come out confident, heads held high, smiling. Others look like they've just turned up, head and shoulders drooping, covered in a cloak of weakness and defeatism. It would have been easy for the first readers of this letter to have suffered from a defeatist attitude. They were probably in little church groups around the area, minorities in their pagan culture, which worshipped many different gods and powers. They were in a culture which recognised the power of religious spirits, a culture which was concerned that the gods would bring bad luck to them because they'd stopped showing them respect when they became Christians.

But Paul wants them to see that Jesus is enthroned above every power; that when he ascended, he entered the heavenly spiritual realm, the place of power and authority, and that he rules over *all* the other powers. Jesus is greater than them all. And the message is the same today. Whatever powers or terrors or forces we encounter, Jesus is more powerful: more powerful than demons and evil spirits, more powerful than binding superstitions, more powerful than the things in the world which can make us fearful, like terrorism, global warming, war, ongoing political chaos. Christ is above every power.

And here's an amazing thing: we *share* in his position of power. As we read on into 2:4-6. Paul shows them what they *were*, but he wants them to see what they *are*: if Christ is raised above every power and seated in heavenly places, so are they, so are we!

Let's pray – as a church – that God will give us wisdom and revelation from his Spirit, so that we can know him better; let's pray that God will increase our sense of the hope to which he has called us; let's pray for greater understanding of the value he has placed on us; and let's pray for a real knowledge of his power at work in us – as individuals, and as the church of Christ, his body, as Paul says, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way. Amen.