

A PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Ephesians 1:15-23

What a privilege it is to be permitted to read and to study this prayer of the Apostle Paul! While he was praying Paul was at his best, as is the case with us. Paul's prayer was a request for a fuller knowledge of those divine blessings which had been mentioned in the hymn of praise in this chapter. He was hopeful that his readers might receive a fuller revelation of God and come to know Him better.

Since this prayer is so comprehensive, let us note some of the elements in it.

I. Thanksgiving. Ephesians 1:15-16.

Someone had conveyed to Paul the good news about the progress which the Ephesians had made in the Christian life, whereupon he commended them for two things, namely, their "faith in the Lord Jesus" and their "love unto all the saints." Paul did not have reference to their initial faith in Christ, at the time when they trusted in Him as Saviour and committed themselves to Him as their Lord, but rather to the expression of their faith in Christ through their good works and genuine love. Any true Christian may be characterized by his faith in and loyalty to Christ, and by his love for others. A person cannot love Christ without showing that fact by his love for others. Love for Christ and love for others are inseparable. One cannot love Christ without loving other people.

The Ephesian Christians, many of whom Paul had won to Christ and had not seen for approximately five years, had made great progress in the growth of grace and for this fact Paul was exceedingly happy and deeply grateful. He assured them that he gave considerable time to prayer on their behalf. When he stated that he did not cease to mention them in his prayers, Paul did not mean to convey the idea that he prayed for them twenty-four hours per day, but rather that he mentioned them regularly in prayer. It may be said that one does not cease to eat until he dies, and yet he may never eat more than three meals a day. Paul's prayers for his readers were prompted by the amazing display of divine grace in their lives, which was exhibited by their faith in Christ, and their love for their fellow-Christians. Love for God's children is ever the fruit of a genuine and strong faith in Christ.

Paul rejoiced in the privilege of assuring the Ephesian Christians that he gave considerable time to prayer on their behalf. It is quite evident that Paul's conception of prayer was not the expression of mere generalities for the relief of the mind or for a psychological reaction of some sort. To him prayer was a personal dealing with God, Who invites His children to come boldly to a throne of grace in order that they may obtain mercy and blessing.

II. Intercession. Ephesians 1:17-19.

After Paul had thanked God for what his readers were, he prayed unto Him for what he wanted them to become. Notice that he addressed his prayer to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." This designation of God indicated that Paul had a profound reverence for Him, and that he approached Him with a consciousness of deep and inexpressible wonder. Paul's reference to God as "the Father of glory," implied that God was the source of all glory, that He shared His glory with His Son Whom He raised from the dead, that He is the One to Whom all glory belongs,

that He is the giver of the glory which will be ours when we enter His presence in our heavenly home. Paul wanted those for whom he prayed to understand the glory that awaited them, and to which they were to be brought by the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul humbly and lovingly approached God, he brought to Him the needs of those for whom he was making intercession. Knowing that God was the source of all that was good for His children, Paul did not ask that those for whom he was praying might have easier lives and be spared of persecution, nor was he concerned about their obtaining great honors or riches, but he asked the heavenly Father to give unto them spiritual discernment and wisdom. He prayed earnestly that they might have a spirit which would be receptive to wisdom and knowledge. He was anxious for them to have a spiritual disposition which would enable them to understand and appreciate what God was doing for them, to receive the divine truths, and to appropriate them in their lives.

The Holy Spirit delights to take the things of Christ as revealed in the Word of God and to make them clear unto us. He wants to take believers into the treasure house of the Scriptures and give them understanding about God and Christ, which they never could obtain through mere human knowledge. It is only through divinely imparted wisdom that we can know experientially and fully the blessings which are available to us in Christ.

Paul knew that, if God had the mastery of their understanding, his readers would be able to live victoriously. Paul longed for them to have an accurate and complete knowledge of the rich blessings which were or might become theirs in and through Christ.

What did Paul want God to enable their spiritual understanding to grasp? He prayed that they might be given such a spiritual revelation that they would be able to understand more clearly three things:

1. The hope of God's calling. Verse 18b.

Paul prayed that they might have such a spiritual revelation that they would be able to understand more clearly the hope which was inspired by the call of God. This calling looked to the past, when He summoned sinners to salvation in and by Christ, and it became effective when they accepted the divine invitation and believed on Him as their Saviour. This calling, or the effectual working of God's grace in the heart whereby one is brought into a saving relationship with Christ, creates a hope of future good also. Hope is a subjective grace and an objective blessing. It is a grace in the soul of the believer in Christ and a blessing that is laid up in heaven for him. When thought of from the angle of the future, hope is a combination of desire, expectation, patience and joy. It is, therefore, the sweetener of our joys, the lightener of our cares, and the soother of our sorrows.

If Christians are to grow in a manner which will please God, they must realize and appreciate the hope — past, present and future — there is in their calling. Are we aware of the immense privileges which we have in Christ and the expectations we have with reference to the life beyond this? Such knowledge will quicken

us to the utmost diligence in Christian service and patience in tribulations. Those who have responded to God's call in the proper manner can certainly face the future with great hope. He Who has called us to salvation will eventually call us to glory also.

2. The glory of God's inheritance. Verse 18-c.

Paul prayed that the believers at Ephesus might know "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;" that is, the riches God possesses in them. It is good to know that the saints have an inheritance in God, but it is also marvelous that God has an inheritance in the saints. They are trophies of His wondrous grace and power. For them He paid a tremendous price, the precious blood of His only begotten Son. Because Christians are His inheritance, they need to know and to appreciate the fact that they are exceedingly precious to Him.

3. The greatness of God's power. Verse 19.

The Apostle besought God to let the Ephesian Christians know the greatness of the power which He was prepared to exert toward them. God is the unfailing source of power. His power is demonstrated in saving us from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and eventually the presence of sin. It is the power of God which saves us and sustains us. As the Bible says, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Peter 1:5).

When God spoke of the greatness of His power, He never referred to His power which brought the universe into existence, great as that was, but rather to the power which was manifested in raising the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Christ was the greatest demonstration of power which the universe has ever known, and our resurrection will be the greatest demonstration of power in the future. The resurrection of Christ was the proof that God's power is stronger than man's sin, and that God's purpose cannot be stopped by any action of men.

Paul's Christian career was a living testimony to the fact that Christ had power to change a sinner into a saint. Whereas he had formerly been an intense persecutor of Christians, he had become an outstanding and useful Christian. Why not pray that God may express His energy or power in and through you?

That same power, which raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, will work in us during our Christian lives, will raise us from the dead after we die, and will bring us to glory. God's great power was exercised in the exaltation of Christ to His right hand, which is the seat of power and authority, and in the giving to Him the headship over all things.

It is our privilege and duty to acknowledge His Lordship over our personalities, our possessions, and our plans. His marvelous power is available to all obedient believers, who desire it enough to receive it and to use it. It is our privilege and obligation to so yield ourselves to the Lord that we may be channels through which His great power can work effectively.

III. Adoration. Ephesians 1:20-23.

Inasmuch as God has exercised His mighty power in raising Christ from the dead, in exalting Him to the place of honor and authority at the right hand of the Father, and in giving to Him the supremacy over all things, and has made this same power available to

His children, in order that they may live victoriously and effectively, on the condition that they receive it and become instruments or channels through which it can work, it certainly behooves us to adore Him and bring to Him all the honor and glory possible. He deserves the best and most adoration, praise and loyalty that loving hearts can present to Him.