

“TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST”

Ephesians 3:13-19

Part 2

Intro: Last week we considered the first part of this prayer; today I want to complete our consideration of it. And when I say “complete,” I do not mean that we are finished with it when we finish this present examination of it because I hope that we will never really be finished with it as long as we live. And perhaps the more we get familiar with this prayer, and actually pray it for ourselves and for the other believers we pray for, the more the Holy Spirit will make the meaning of the prayer not only clearer to us, but more precious to us.

Paul’s burden for the Ephesians in this prayer was they would be strengthened with might by the Spirit of God in their inner being. And to accomplish that purpose Paul prayed that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith. This request did not mean that Christ was not already indwelling them, but Paul was concerned about each believer’s personal relationship with the Lord. He was concerned that each believer would live in such fellowship with the Lord that the Lord would be at home in their hearts. It is wonderful to know that He lives in us, but it is even more wonderful to recognize His presence day after day. We are not to ignore Him. We are to commune with Him, and to trust Him to teach us and to enable us to do things which we could never do without Him. We all know that we need Him when we are going through a trial of any kind, *but we must learn that we need Him all of the time.* This is what is involved in making Christ at home in our hearts.

But according to the Apostle Paul’s prayer, what will such fellowship with the Lord lead to? Last week I said that the requests of this prayer were like links in a chain: one request leads to another; to get to the second you must have the first, and to get to the third you must have the first and the second.

The first request was in verses 16 and the first part of verse 17. Actually there are two requests here, but the one in verse 16 is the main burden that Paul had while the request in the first part of verse 17 is the first step that is necessary in being strengthened in our “inner man.”

Now let us look at:

II. THE SECOND REQUEST¹ (Eph. 3:17b-19a).

Please note that in verse 16 we are concerned with the Holy Spirit when we consider what it means to be “strengthened with might ... in the inner man.”

But then in verse 17 the emphasis turns to Christ. The Holy Spirit strengthens us through the Lord Jesus dwelling in our hearts. And it is through Christ that we learn what it means to be “rooted and grounded in love.” And it seems that we are concerned with the love of Christ down through the beginning of verse 19. The four dimensions of the love of Christ are mentioned in verse 18: “The breadth, the length, and depth, and height.” However, in considering the love of Christ we need to remember that we are considering the love of God. Their love for us is identical. What we can say about the love of Christ we can also say about the love of God. Both are equally great. And it is through fellowship with Christ that we learn of His love, and this, in turn, leads to the fulfillment of Paul’s last request, “that ye might be filled with all of the fulness of God.” But I must not get ahead of myself here, so let us go back to the last part of verse 17.

Our salvation is “rooted and grounded in love” -- not in our love for God, but in God’s love for us. And not in our love for Christ, but in Christ’s love for us. “God is love.” Love really finds its definition in God and in Christ. If we want to know what love is, then we have to know God; we have to know Christ. And what makes God’s love and Christ’s love for us so amazing is that They, the holy Father, and His equally holy Son, would set their love upon us, guilty, vile, rebellious sinners. And what makes their love even more amazing is that it was God’s love that sent Christ, and it was Christ’s love that caused Him to come into this world as a Man, not just to tell us about the love of God (although He did that), but to demonstrate God’s love by going to the Cross to die for our sins.

We as believers are “rooted and grounded” in that love.

Now there are two figures of speech here. Westcott pointed out in his commentary that “rooted” has to do with a plant, say, a vine. But grounded has to do with a building (or, we might say, with a foundation). The first pictures the love of Christ as growing; the second pictures His love as stable. This does not mean that Christ’s love for us is growing,

¹ I. is in Part 1 of my messages on this text.

but that our apprehension of His love grows. And the same has to do with the stability of Christ's love. It does not become more stable; our foundation does not grow stronger. Christ's love is infinite and eternal. But it is our comprehension, our understanding, of the stability of His love which grows.

So, when we are saved, we are "rooted and grounded in love." But as we walk in fellowship with the Lord, getting better acquainted with Him, our understanding of His love grows and our confidence in His love is strengthened.

Paul used these same two figures of speech in his letter to the church at Colosse. Listen to what he wrote in Col. 2:6-7:

6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Walking in Christ is equal to saying "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," as we have it in the prayer in Ephesians 3.

No one can become a Christian without Christ, and no one can make any progress at all in the Christian life without Christ. We need to know about all of our Lord's attributes -- His power (which amounts to absolute sovereignty), His wisdom and His knowledge, His eternity, His immutability, *but nothing is more important than knowing about His love*. His love includes such kindred attributes as His mercy, His grace, His long-suffering, His compassion, His goodness, and so on.

We might speak of *Christ's four dimensional love*. It has "breadth" and "length" and "depth" and "height." The fact that Christ loves us, His people, is most amazing, but when we look into the particulars of His love for us, it is more amazing than ever!

But let us not leave out a word of this Spirit-inspired prayer of the Apostle Paul. Before we think about these dimensions, notice the words at the beginning of verse 18: "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints." We are believers are absolutely dependent upon the Spirit of God to strengthen our minds so that we may be able to grasp what Lenski called "the great reality Paul has in mind" (Lenski, p. 497). You and I won't get it just by reading it (although we need to start with reading). Nor will we grasp it just because we hear somebody preach on it, as thorough and careful as their explanation might be. It is the Spirit Who

must enable us to understand it and to help us in making the application of it to our lives. This is why Paul prayed this prayer for the Ephesians. This is why we need to pray this prayer for ourselves, and to pray it for the other believers we pray for. We can never know everything that there is to know about God's love, but we need to depend upon the Holy Spirit to teach us, and we need to be constantly growing in our understanding of the love of God. As long as we live there will always be more that we can know, and more that we need to apply to ourselves of what we know.

It is interesting that Paul added, "with all saints." This means that in our desire to understand Christ's love for us, we must know that this is not just to be personal for us, but that our fellowship even with each other will be increased and become more pleasing to God when the love of Christ is the focus of our fellowship together. If our fellowship with each other is not what it should be, we need to pay more attention to the love of Christ and of God.

Now what about the four dimensions of Christ love? Expositors seem to be hesitant about being specific on these details. I don't know that I have the right explanation, but let me tell you what I think that they mean.

"The breadth" -- which means, *the width*. How inclusive is the love of Christ? The Apostle John had this to say about Christ's love in John 13:1:

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, **having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.**

And then we find that when the Lord prayed the prayer we find in John 17, He was praying especially for those whom the Father had given to Him. And He said this in verse 23:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

I think we can apply this word "breadth" to the wide variety that you will find among the Lord's people -- the high, the low; the rich, the poor; the young, the old (because people come to Christ at all ages). You find among the people of God those who are from every tribe and tongue and nation.

Perhaps it can apply to the wide variety of sins out of which the Lord has saved us, and then the wide variety of needs that exist among the people

of God. Your heart can be blessed to overflowing when you think of the “breadth,” the width, of the love of Christ.

What about “the length” of the love of Christ and of God? I don’t know of a better answer than we find in Jeremiah 31:3:

The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

You and I have a hard time comprehending a love like that. That verse means that there never has been a time when the Lord did not love us, and there will never come a time when He will stop loving us. Try to comprehend how long it is from eternity to eternity, and you will understand more about the length of Christ’s love. And if it is from eternity to eternity, then that little period of time between our births and our deaths is included in its entirety also. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What about “depth”? Does this not have something to do with the depth into which we had fallen because of our sins? And may it not also include those depths of despair and often grief which we often experience? It seems to me that the love of Christ is always reaching us in the depth of something or other where we need His help.

And then the fourth dimension is that of “height.”

I believe that Paul was speaking about the love of God and the love of Christ when he wrote the first seven verses of Ephesians 2. There you have both “depth” and “height.” Let me read Eph. 2:1-7 for you.

Oh, that the Lord would enable us to grasp more of the meaning of His love for us. It “passeth knowledge.” That is, it goes far beyond what any of us is capable of understanding on our own. By the grace of God it is possible for us to know the unknowable! But such knowledge comes to us by the Holy Spirit.

Now I am not speaking of something that comes fully to us in a moment. I am speaking of a life-long growth in our understanding and personal enjoyment of the love of Christ. The more we know, the more glorious Christ’s love will become to us, and the greater will be the difference that we will see in our lives. Let us pray this prayer for ourselves and for each other continually that we might experience the great blessing toward which this whole prayer moves us. And this brings me to the third and

last request:

III. THE THIRD REQUEST (Eph. 3:19b).

What is it? **“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”**

Do you think that any of us is capable of expounding such a glorious expression? I agree with Matthew Henry when he said this about this final request that the Apostle Paul made. This is his comment:

We should not dare to use it if we did not find it in the Scriptures (Vol. VI, p. 700).

And I agree with him when he said that Paul must have had in mind the capacity we all have, a differing capacity in each case, but a capacity which is growing for us to know and to enjoy our God through Christ, and in which we seek to be conformed to Christ as He is revealed in the Word of God.

Paul seems to have had this very truth in mind as he concluded the prayer that is recorded for us at the end of chapter 1. (See and read Eph. 1:19-23.)

One of the amazing things about the Members of the Godhead is that the heaven of the heavens cannot contain them, and yet all Three can abide in us in the completeness of Their Persons. I can say, and you can say, as believers, that Christ lives in us, lives in us so completely that it is just like it would be if He did not exist anywhere else. And yet Christ is so great that He is omnipresent, present everywhere. How amazing it is that we can be filled with all of the fulness of God!

This is true individually, and it is true of the true Church and all who are a part of it.

Think of what it would mean to the church and to the world if all of us who know the Lord Jesus as Savior were walking in such fellowship with the Lord Jesus that we would be growing in our understanding of His love for us, and were really grasping this great truth as a powerful influence in our lives. This is what Paul earnestly prayed would take place in the church at Ephesus.

Concl: Being filled with the fulness of God does not mean that we become like a Member of the Godhead. But it does mean that by the power of the Holy Spirit you can I can become more like our Lord Jesus Christ, and manifest more of Him in our lives from day to day.

A PRAYER OF WORSHIP

Ephesians 3:20, 21

- **Intro:** I am considering the last two verses of Ephesians 3 separately from the prayer which immediately precedes it, but I do not want to give anyone the impression that they are separate prayers. They belong together. I am considering this *prayer of worship* separately only because the earlier part of the prayer and this conclusion are both so full of food for our souls that I did not want to rush through the prayer and be forced to admit things which would be for our profit. Even though, after today, I will have given three Sundays to this prayer, yet I wonder how much there is in these verses which I have overlooked, or not dealt with as fully as I might have. And I am sure that I will feel the same about verses 20 and 21 when I have finished my message today. There is always more to be learned every time we come back to the same passages of Scripture.

- Matthew Henry made this comment on verses 20 and 21 of Ephesians 3: “It is proper to conclude our prayers with praises” (VI, 700). And he is right. As we have seen in the first prayer of this epistle in chapter 1, it is even proper for us to begin our prayers with praises, or to offer prayers which are nothing but praises. Quite obviously Paul’s heart was overwhelmed with the glory of the prayer which he had just offered to the Lord. How incredible it is that we should expect Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith. And equally incredible it is that we might be “filled with all the fulness of God.” And surely the very mention of such requests as these should make us realize that only God could possibly bestow such blessings upon us. Furthermore, we all must admit that such blessings require *omnipotence!* And so Paul addressed himself “unto Him,” i.e., “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Who is also *our heavenly Father*. It is only from our great and powerful God that we could ever hope to receive such amazing blessings. This conclusion to Paul’s prayer focuses our attention upon *the sovereign power of our great and glorious God*.

And so let me take as my first point, *the ability of God*.

I. THE ABILITY OF GOD (Eph. 3:20).

- When we link together, as Paul did in this epistle, the love of God (1:4b-5) with the wisdom of God (3:10) and then add the power of God, we have three of God’s most glorious attributes, or characteristics. Paul’s thoughts were certainly on *the power of God* both in the prayer in the first

chapter as well as in the prayer here in chapter 3. Note 1:19-23 and then 3:16. Without the power of God, neither the prayer at the end of chapter 1 nor the prayer here in chapter 3, could have been prayed. That is one big reason we pray, isn't it? It is to seek blessings from God which we cannot produce ourselves. We pray because He is able and we are not able. He is all-powerful; we are hopeless and helpless without His blessing. And so our hope in prayer rests upon the love, wisdom, and power of God.

In preparing this message my thoughts turned to *the ability of God*, and what the Bible has to say about what God is able to do. And as I began to gather passages which speak of God's power I realize that the Bible is really one long testimony of the power of God. *Creation* would have been impossible without the power of God (in spite of what the evolutionists say). The children of Israel could not have gotten out of Egypt, nor into the land of Canaan, if it has not been for the power of God. Think of the many miraculous things God accomplished to deliver His people, to provide for His people, to guide His people, and to protect His people.

There are many wonderful statements in Scripture, hundreds of them, which speak of *the power of God*. Let me give you just a few of them.

Think of David's conflict with the giant Goliath. There was no man in the army of Israel who was willing to go out to face Goliath alone. When David learned what was going on, he went to King Saul and requested the opportunity to fight the giant, and this is what he had to say to the king:

David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, **he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine**. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee (1 Sam. 17:37).

David was a firm believer in the awesome power of God.

Or take the experience of Daniel's three friends who refused to worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar. And they were brought before the king to face their judgment. Do you remember how they answered the king? Listen to their words when the king indicated he would go ahead with their punishment. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said,

17 If it be so, **our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace**, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which

thou hast set up (Dan. 3:17-18).

In their minds there was no question about God's ability to deliver them; the only question they had was whether or not it was His will. All of our hearts have been moved by accounts like these. And there are more that we could select from the OT, but let us go on into the NT.

Every miracle that our Lord performed while He was here on earth was a testimony to the power of God.

Matthew has told us about two blind men who followed the Lord into a house after they had asked Him to have mercy upon them. Knowing that they wanted their sight, the Lord said to them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" Without any hesitation they said, "Yea." And the Lord responded by saying, "According to your faith be it unto you." And they both received their sight. That was the power of God.

Paul in the NT reached back into the life of Abraham to show how strongly Abraham believed in the power of God. When God promised him a son, and then waited until both he and Sarah were too old to have children, Paul said this about Abraham's faith:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 **And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform** (Rom. 4:20-21).

And then in the book of Hebrews we read this about Abraham when God told him to sacrifice the same son that God had so miraculously given to him. Listen to Heb. 11:17-19:

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

19 **Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead;** from whence also he received him in a figure.

And then we have these great verses which also speak of the mighty power of God -- Rom. 14:4:

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: **for God is able to make him stand.**

Also, 2 Cor. 9:8:

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that

ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

The ability of God extends also to the changes that will be made in our bodies when the Lord returns:

20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby **he is able even to subdue all things unto himself** (Phil. 3:20-21).

And I can't leave out Paul's great statement of his faith in the ability of God in 2 Tim. 1:12:

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that **he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.**

And we all at one time or another have taken comfort in the words we find in Heb. 2:17-18:

17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, **he is able to succour them that are tempted.**

One more passage -- Jude 24, 25:

24 **Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,**

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Now let us add to these verses, the words of our text in verse 20. (Read.)

This is what God is able to do. Not just what we have asked Him to do. And not just what we have thought of asking Him to do. But far in excess of all of that, and then abundantly above beyond all of that.

Now apply these words to the prayer which we have just considered here in Ephesians 3. Would you have ever thought to ask that Christ might dwell in your heart? And would you have ever thought of asking for an ever-increasing understanding of the love of God? And how long would it have taken you to even think of asking that you might be filled with all of the fulness of God?

Paul made these requests, but he only did it because the Holy Spirit put in his heart to pray such a prayer. But not even he “on his own” would ever have conceived that the Lord might grant such requests for His people. *And we know that He not only is able to do these things, but the prayer is an expression both of His willingness to grant these requests, and His intention to do so!*

There are many times when we pray but do not know what the will of God is, but not so with the requests in the preceding prayer. They really amount to promises, and so we can ask for these blessings knowing that we can expect to receive them! It is no wonder that Paul could not turn to the rest of his letter before stopping to offer *this prayer of worship!*

And notice at the end of verse 20 that these are blessings that are spiritual blessings. They are going to be answered inwardly, not by us, but “according to the power that worketh in us.” In his letter to the church at Colosse Paul spoke of “striving, according to his (God or Christ’s) working in me mightily.”

But now we must go on to verse 21 where we read about:

II. THE GLORY OF GOD (Eph. 3:21).

Here we have the second “unto Him.”

Surely there should be no question but that the glory for the answers to such prayers as we have in this epistle belongs to God, and to God alone. No true Christian understanding the unworthiness of his own heart could ever even think that he could in the least way be deserving of such blessings. It all belongs to God. They are blessings which God gives in pure grace.

But where are you going to find such glory given to God. The world doesn’t know anything about such blessings, and wouldn’t be interested in them if it did. It is only “in the church” of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the glorious Head, and coming from those who are members of the body of Christ, that such praise will be given to God. What a shame it is that we don’t praise God more than we do! If we don’t praise God, no one else among the sons of men will.

But notice a very important thing about our praises. They are never pleasing to God, and so never acceptable to Him, unless we bring our worship and our praise through Christ Jesus. In fact, we can’t have any

dealings with God except through our Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning our praise, I would remind you of Heb. 13:15:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Paul had this to say to the church at Colosse:

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:17).

And earlier in this epistle to the church at Ephesus Paul had reminded the believers that it is only “through him” that we both, Jewish believers and Gentile believers) have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:18). This is true in salvation. Cf. John 14:6. And it is true in everything that has to do with our relationship to God as His people.

But how long will this last? How long will we need to glorify God with our worship and our praises? Paul gave us the answer. It is to be “throughout all ages, world without end.” Lit. we could translate this expression, “*unto all generations of the age of the ages*” (Westcott, p. 54). What does it mean? It means *forever!* And it means that the church will never be destroyed, but that from His people God will draw forth from the hearts of His people praise and worship that will always bring glory to Himself.

Concl: Paul concluded his prayer like we conclude our prayers, with the word, “Amen.” This word comes directly into the English from the Greek, and the same is true of the Hebrew language. It is *Amen* in all three. What does it mean?

This is the word which the Lord uses over and over again *at the beginning* of some of His saying to emphasize that they were most assuredly true. We have the translation, “Verily, verily.” When the lord used it twice, it took on the force of a superlative. When this word was used in the services of the synagogues at the end of a reading, or at the end of a discourse, or at the end of a prayer, it meant “*so be it, may it be fulfilled.*” This usage came over into the early church when the people would respond to readings or messages or prayers in the same way. It was their way of making the reading or message or prayer, their own.

But we all know how easily this can become a mere formality. When we close our prayers with an “amen,” do we really want God to do what we have asked Him to do? Even considering Paul’s prayers here in his

epistle to the Ephesians, are these blessings what we really want for ourselves? Do Paul's prayers really reflect what we want for ourselves, and what we want for the people we pray for? Are these the blessings we would like to see poured out on the church in this year of 1996? Do you find an "amen" in your heart today?

Matthew Henry concluded his commentary on this chapter by saying, "*Amen*. So be it; and so will it certainly be" (VI, 700). May God grant that it will be so in all of our hearts. May He grant us these blessings, and may we learn to praise and worship Him more and more.

PRAYING AND WATCHING

Ephesians 6:18-20

Intro: The book of Ephesians has received a considerable amount of attention here at Trinity Bible Church since the beginning of the year. For the first month and a half of this year we spent six Sundays in the book of Ephesians in our SS lessons. It was about that time that I got to Ephesians in this present series on *the prayers of the Apostle Paul*. To avoid the possibility that we might have the same passage on any given Sunday, I turned aside temporarily in these Sunday morning services to consider some of the prayers of the OT. But then, when our lessons on Ephesians in SS were concluded, I came back to this epistle to continue with Paul's prayers. Then in a class which Lucille teaches in our home a couple of times a month, she felt led to take up certain themes from Ephesians, and she continues with that at the present time. So we have had a lot of exposure to this wonderful epistle, but I am sure that we would all agree that we can never get too much of it. But usually when something like this happens, and it is all unplanned, it is an indication that the Lord has something for us, or more likely, many things for us, that He wants us to learn.

When Paul wrote Ephesians he was going through one of the most difficult times in his life. He was in prison for preaching the Gospel of the grace of God. But, as is the case with all of our trials, it was a time when the Lord was teaching him some important lessons, and a time during which four of his most wonderful letters were written. I am referring, of course, to Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. That is the order in which they appear in our New Testaments, but that probably was not the order in which they were written. The order in which they were written was more likely Philippians first, Philemon second, Colossians third, and Ephesians last. I certainly would not necessarily put Ephesians ahead of the other epistles in value and blessing. But I do think that probably Ephesians gives us the crowning message of all that was upon Paul's heart during those difficult years in Rome. It is the longest of the four epistles. All of them contain a strong emphasis upon prayer, but there is more about prayer than in any of the other three. We can see that while Paul always gave prayer a large place in his daily life, yet his emphasis on prayer was stronger at the close of his first imprisonment than it had ever been before. The whole first chapter of Ephesians is given to prayer. The same is true of the latter part of the third chapter where we find another wonderful prayer. As we have seen Paul not only told the churches that he was praying for them, but he wrote out in detail the specific requests he was bringing to God for them.

The passage that I want to consider with you today is different from the prayers in Ephesians 1 and different from the prayer in Ephesians 3. Here he was pointing out the importance of prayer by telling the believers at Ephesus that *they* needed to be praying, how they needed to pray, and those especially for whom their prayers should be offered. The verse that I want to focus our attention upon is verse 18 of chapter 6, but I want also to include a few words about verses 19 and 20 as I conclude today.

I asked Kelly Spafford to read from verse 10 down through verse 20 because I wanted you to be reminded of the place that verse 18 has in what Paul was saying. He was speaking of the warfare he was involved in, but which they also were involved in, and which all of us today are involved in. We could truthfully say that Paul was *a prisoner of war*, and yet in his confinement he was carrying on in the conflict even though the nature of his ministry at this time was quite different from what it had been before. And yet, as you read what he had to say about his warfare, it should be interesting to all of us to see that he did not consider the Jews who had persecuted him, and wanted to kill him, as his main enemies. Nor did he lash out at the Roman government as his enemy. It is true that he was opposed by both Jews and Gentiles, but he realized, and he wanted the Ephesian church to realize, that the real enemies were not human beings. You see this in verse 12. (Read.) He could not see his real enemies because they were not human beings; they were spirit beings. They were not good spirit beings; they were evil. They were the Devil and his angels. They were demonic. And Paul could see that the ultimate enemies were the fallen angels. They fell in their attempt to unseat God from the throne of heaven, and although they were unsuccessful, they have continue a time-long attempt to defeat God by concentrating their opposition upon the people of God. And there is not a believer in any generation that has not felt the opposition of the Evil one. I am not saying that we don't have trouble from the world because we do, and Paul did, too. Nor am I saying that we do not give ourselves trouble by the pull of our own evil natures. But we all need to realize that in our lives and in our service the Devil and his demons will do everything that they can to defeat us. The warfare continues, and it is imperative that we know how to prepare daily for the battle, and that we know how to fight.

So let me remind you from our Scripture reading what is:

I. OUR FIRST GREAT NEED IN THIS WARFARE (Eph. 6:10-17).

It is that we not only know what our armor is, but that we have it on. The reason for this is that this warfare requires spiritual strength, strength that

we can only find in the Lord. (Read v. 10). All of us have tried to live for the Lord and to engage in the battles of life in our own strength only to find that our strength is not enough. *We need the Lord and His strength, and the place where we find His strength is in the Word of God.*

I am not going to deal with the parts of the armor today, but I want to remind you again that every part of the armor has something to do with the Word of God -- what we know about it, how we are using it in our lives, the faith that God gives us through His Word, plus the fact that the Word as the sword of the Spirit is one of our main weapons by which we engage in this warfare. I say "one" because there is another, and this brings me to verse 18.

II. OUR SECOND GREAT NEED IN THIS WARFARE (Eph. 6:18a).

It is for PRAYER. Prayer is not just an option for us, something that we can use when we get into trouble or face one of our many trials. Prayer is an absolute necessity for us *every day!*. Paul made it clear that a main objective in this warfare is to be able *to stand!* And no Christian is going to be able to stand in the battles that we have to face unless he prays.

In Charles Simeon's sermon on this text he began by saying this:

It is graciously ordained of God that none of his creatures should be independent of Him: however richly they may be furnished with other gifts or graces, they are under the necessity of receiving continual supplies from Him, and of acknowledging Him, from day to day, as the one source of all their benefits. Hence, in addition to the armor with which the Christian is arrayed from head to foot, it is necessary that he wait upon God in prayer... (Vol. XVII, pp. 507, 508).

Sometimes a Christian will be strong in the Word, but weak in prayer. Another will be strong in prayer, but weak in the Word. Many are weak both in the Word and in prayer. But, if we want to please God and to see His blessing even as Paul did in prison, we must be strong in the Word and strong in prayer. This is why the apostles in the early church refused to be burdened down with other good responsibilities if it would keep them from giving themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. *We all need to check ourselves to see if we are weak in these areas of life where we need to be strong.*

This past week we had in our OT Bible reading 1 Samuel 12. That is the chapter where the children of Israel realized that they had rebelled against the Lord in asking for a king so that they could be like other nations. And they asked Samuel to pray for them so that God would not strike them dead for making such a request. Samuel had some very wonderful and encouraging words to tell them about the faithfulness of God. But among other things Samuel said this:

Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you... (1 Sam. 12:23a).

I have read that verse many times before, but as I read it this past week I asked the Lord again to keep me from sinning against Him by not praying for you and the other people that the Lord has laid on my heart. Not only do we lose out by our failure to pray, but we are standing in the way of blessing for others, and worst of all, we are sinning against the Lord. *No one can ever say too much about the importance of prayer. We need to be filling our hearts daily with the Word of God, and then we need also to be faithful in prayer.*

But let us notice more in detail what Paul had to say in our text. And you and I can be sure that Paul practiced what he preached. The prayers we find in his epistles should be enough to convince us that he was not only a man of the Word, but a man of prayer.

Paul used two words in this verse which we need to notice in particular. One is “praying”; the other is “watching.” Let me speak of what he said about “praying” first.

III. HOW WE ARE TO PRAY (Eph. 6:18a).

I doubt if I need to remind any of you that when we read the Word God speaks to us; when we pray, we are speaking to Him. He speaks to us also in His providential dealings with us, and we know when He is dealing with us. But primarily He speaks through His Word, and then we respond in prayer.

So, although Paul did not specifically mention it here, he assumed that when he said, “praying,” he was speaking of those times when we talk to God. The order of the words in the Greek text is actually this: *With all prayer and supplication praying.*

The word that is translated “prayer” is the common word used in the NT for *prayer addressed to God*, as contrasted with a request that one person

might make to another person. But when Paul said, “all prayer,” he meant *all kinds of prayer*. And since “praying” is a present participle he meant that we as believers are to be praying constantly to God, using all kinds of prayer: worship, thanksgiving, confession, intercession for others, as well as requests for ourselves. We are not just to pray on certain occasions, such as when we eat, or when we go to bed, or when we go to church, nor just when we are facing a crisis of some kind, but we are to live in an attitude of prayer to God.

The constancy of our praying is brought also by the word “always.” The Greek literally means, *at all seasons*. No one needs to tell us to pray when things go wrong, but prayer needs to be such a major part of our lives that we pray whether we are in trouble or not. David requested that he would be able to dwell in the house of the Lord all of the days of his life, not just to ask God for things, but to worship Him -- “to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple” (Psa. 27:4).

“Supplication” is described by many as speaking of *the earnestness* with which we are to approach God, with probably an emphasis upon our own needs, but not exclusively so. When Jacob told the Lord he would not let Him go until the Lord blessed him, he was engaged in supplication.

But let us not overlook those important words, “in the Spirit.” When we “walk in the Spirit” we are walking *in dependence upon the Spirit*; when we pray “in the Spirit” we are praying *in dependence upon the Spirit*. We need the Spirit to keep us reminded of our need to pray. We need the Spirit to teach us how to pray. None of us will be faithful in prayer, nor will we be effective in prayer, without the help and blessing and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We need to be consciously depending upon the Holy Spirit as we pray. Remember what Jude wrote in verses 20 and 21 of his epistle:

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, **praying in the Holy Spirit,**

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

The Word is the Sword of the Spirit, and we are to pray in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. We can't get along without the Holy Spirit in our spiritual warfare.

But now let us notice what Paul said about:

IV. HOW WE ARE TO WATCH (Eph. 6:18b).

To watch is to be intent on what you are doing; in this case, prayer. It is “to exercise constant vigilance over something” (Thayer, p. 9). It is a word which can be illustrated by the way a shepherd watches over his sheep. Cf. Luke 2:8:

— And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, **keeping watch** over their flock by night.

How are we to watch, and for whom? Of course, we are to watch over our own lives, watch over our own relationship with the Lord, watch over the attention we give to the Word, and watch over our relationship to God in prayer. But here the emphasis is upon “all saints.”

Now Paul did not mean that we are responsible for every saint on the face of the earth, but he did mean that we are to be on the lookout for needs and problems and burdens and trials that the people of God are going through, because a part of the battle is that we are to help each other in this warfare. We don’t intrude into the lives of our fellow believers, but when we see a need, it should bring us to God on their behalf. And here we have the word “supplication” again, not here for ourselves, but for other believers who need the Lord’s help in some way.

— And Paul also used the word “perseverance.” This is a good translation. Paul used the verb from which this noun comes when in Rom. 12:12 he said, “Continuing instant in prayer.” That is, we are not just to pray once and forget about that person and his or her need, but we are to keep praying as long as the need continues. You see it is in our times of trial and difficulty that the Devil is quick to take advantage of us. It is then that he tries to knock us off of our feet. And so the need is urgent that we pray, and continue to pray. We need to persevere in prayer.

To me it is interesting that at this point Paul mentioned a need that he had, and so let us look as we close at:

V. PAUL’S REQUEST (Eph. 6:19, 20).

— If the believers in Ephesus were interested in *watching St. Paul*, this is what he wanted them to see. This was his most urgent need -- not that he might be released from prison (although I am sure he would have wanted that), nor that they might send him some money, but that right there in prison he might have the opportunity to speak to others about the Savior, and that, when he did, that he would do it frankly, confidently, clearly.

It took a lot of humility for Paul to make such a request. It showed where

his heart was, but it also showed that he was keenly aware of the threat that such conversation would be to his life. He was in prison for preaching the Gospel, and the possibilities were strong that his condition would get worse if he persisted in doing the very thing for which he had been arrested.

What does this tell us? It tells us that no child of God, even though he might be the Apostle Paul, gets to the place in his life where he does not need the Lord, and to get that help, is thankful for the help that God gives in answer to prayer.

Concl: I said earlier in my message that we all need to examine our own hearts to see where we are in relation to prayer. Do you pray? It is hard to think that you could be a Christian if you don't pray. If you do, how much do you pray? What do you pray for? For whom do you pray? How are you faring in the warfare? Are you on your feet, standing, or are you a casualty in the battle.

I confess very frankly to you that I have never been more conscious of my need of the Lord's blessing and help, and of my need to be more faithful in prayer. I'm thankful for everyone who prays for me. It delights my heart more than anyone can know when even some of our children tell me that they are praying for me.

As we come to the Lord's table today, we are told in Scripture that we are to examine ourselves. This is a major point on which we all need to examine ourselves. We are here to remember the Lord. Surely the remembrance of what He did to save us should make us all the more desirous of doing that which pleases Him pre-eminently by giving ourselves more and more to the Word of God and prayer. May the Holy Spirit enable to us pray as we should, and to trust the Lord as we should regardless of what the trials or circumstances of our lives might be.

A SHORT PRAYER OF GREAT IMPORTANCE

Ephesians 6:23, 24

Intro: Let me ask you a question as we begin today. How much attention do you pay to the closing verses of the epistles of the NT? Sometimes some verses like Jude 24, 25 may attract our attention, but we can easily read over verses like we have at the end of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians without paying too much attention to them. One reason for this may be that they are quite similar to the way Paul concluded all of his epistles, especially Eph. 6:24 -- and yet, while it is similar, it is different. Men who have published their sermons on Ephesians do not usually include these two verses. Commentaries which go verse by verse through Ephesians do include them. Maybe our familiarity with word like *peace*, *love*, *faith*, and *grace* may make it possible for us to finish reading the epistle without paying a great deal of attention to how Paul referred to them.

If we really haven't paid much attention to these two verses, we need to remember that Paul was writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit certainly would not waste words. Nor would the Apostle Paul waste words. His greetings were very significant, and we can say the same about the way he closed his epistles. So we must not minimize the importance of any verse, up to the very last verse. If Paul wrote it, he must have seen the need for what he said or he would not have written it --especially when we can see that it is actually his closing prayer with which he concluded the epistle.

Let me remind you, too, that the words "at Ephesus" in Eph. 1:1 are not found in many good MSS. This has led many to the conclusion that this epistle, while it may have been sent to Ephesus first, may have been sent as a circular letter -- possibly for all of the churches in the Roman province of Asia, the churches mentioned in Rev. 1-3. If this is the case, then we would assume that what Paul was praying for in the prayers we have in this epistle, were prayers that applied to the needs of believers in every place -- and we might add, the believers in every generation. If so, this would make the last two verses very, very important. *Besides, we all know in our own hearts that every day we live we need more peace, we need more love, we need more faith, and we need more grace.* And, in reading through this epistle, you will find that Paul mentioned each one of these words many times. They are all very important words in the life of every Christian if we are really intent on living to please the Lord.

And so this is more than a conclusion, or a benediction. Its place in the

epistle gives it special prominence, and should have made every believer who has ever heard this epistle read, or who has read it for himself, think about how these words relate to his own life -- or to her life, as the case may be.

I. THE EMPHASIS IN THESE VERSES.

Now it is clear that Paul was writing about the way he was praying for those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Verse 23 begins with the words, “Peace be to **the brethren.**” And in verse 24 Paul was praying for **those who “love our Lord Jesus Christ** in sincerity,” as it is stated in the KJV. So he was not speaking of the grace of God that brings us salvation; he was speaking of the grace that believers need in their daily lives. Similarly he was not speaking of the peace that we have when we first trust in Christ, “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” He was speaking of the need we have for peace in our daily lives. The same can be said of love and of faith. *Every believer has experienced grace, peace, love, and faith.* What Paul was speaking about is the continuing need all of us has for peace and love and faith and grace in our daily lives. And this is true of generation after generation of the Lord’s people. It is true for every one of us today. If that were not the case you would not find Paul mentioning “grace” and “peace” at the beginning of his epistles. These words are not only words which we met and came to understand when we were saved, but we need to carry them with us all through our lives here on earth. And I am sure that we will experience each one of these perfectly throughout eternity.

Now let us look at each of these words, and learn as much as we can why Paul would pray a prayer like this. “Peace” is mentioned first; “love” and “faith” are brought together here; and then the epistle closes with Paul’s prayer for “grace.”

So let us look at:

II. THESE FOUR GREAT WORDS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

I do not mean to imply that there are the only great words which we as Christians need, but they are certainly four of the greatest. I feel sure that you agree.

The first is:

A. “Peace” (Eph. 6:23).

As believers we have peace with God. I am going to be speaking about that tonight at our communion service. That is one of the greatest blessings of our salvation. We have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” But we all know that living in the kind of a world we live in, we need “the peace of God” in our hearts every day that we live.

And I can’t help but think that Paul’s prayer for peace has a special place at this point in his epistle because he had just been speaking about the warfare we are engaged in with the Enemy of our souls, and all of the demonic forces which are arrayed against us. Paul was doing here what he had exhorted all believers to do in the verse which we had last Sunday, “watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” It had to be a primary matter of concern to every believer that Paul himself was writing from a Roman prison. The believers in the early church suffered greatly for their faith. There would have been a constant tendency to be given over to fear. Plus they had all of the trials which come to us in the course of any day. And so Paul was praying that their hearts would be kept in peace.

Peace is never separated from our obedience to the Lord. Paul had placed a special emphasis in this epistle upon *the walk of the people of God*. And by their walk he was not just thinking about how we behave outwardly, but whether or not we are obeying God from the heart. He taught the Ephesians (and us) that they needed to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” -- which meant that they were to be humble and loving, seeking always to be at peace with each other. You see this at the beginning of chapter 4. Then in 4:17 he told them that they were not to live like people in the world live. In 5:1 he told them to “walk in love.” In 5:8 he told them to “walk as children of light.” And in 5:15 he told them to “walk circumspectly.” What I am saying is that we cannot ignore how we are living if we expect to have peace in our hearts. That is one reason that when some testing comes along, we immediately begin to think about how we have been living, how careless we may have become in some areas of our lives. We don’t buy the blessing of the Lord with our obedience, but it is clear in Scripture that obedient saints have the greatest reason to expect God’s blessing.

Undoubtedly Paul, as he spoke of “peace...to the brethren,” was thinking also about prayer such as he encouraged in Phil. 4:6, 7. (Quote.)

Isaiah said that the Lord would keep us in perfect peace when our minds are stayed upon Him. Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4. (Quote.) So it is clear that “peace” and trust have a vital relationship with each other. *That brings*

us to our next words:

B. “Love with faith” (Eph. 6:23).

— Do you suppose that Paul was suggesting in his prayer that “love with faith,” or *love and faith*, are the fruit of peace. He certainly was binding together *love* and *faith*, indicating that if we have love, we are going to have faith, and if we have faith we are going to have love. Our love is love for God, but it is also love for each other. We all should know by now that if our love for God suffers, so will our love for each other. And if our love for each other suffers, so will our love for God. But when our love for God and each other are in place, then there can be real joy and peace in trusting the Lord.

This is the interpretation that Paul was putting on faith. It is trusting God. And trusting God is the fruit of our love for Him, and our love for each other as the people of God.

— When we think of love as it relates to our lives, we need to think of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians. That is where we find God’s definition of love. Love is even greater than faith because true faith has to be founded upon love. I hope that all of us will remember how Paul expressed himself here when speaking of love and faith. He said, “love with faith.” We may pray to have our faith strengthened, and the first thing that the Lord does is to show us how unloving we have been. So if we are to have faith, and really trust the Lord as we should, it has to be that it will be “love with faith.” Think about that expression, and ask the Lord to keep you from forgetting it.

The fourth word is:

C. “Grace” (Eph. 6:24).

The more I study that word “grace,” the greater it becomes to me. Without the grace of God none of us would ever have been saved. Without the grace of God our lives as believers would be far less pleasing to the Lord than they are. Grace tells us that God does not give us what we deserve to have because of our sins, but He does give us what we could never deserve, not only in saving us, but in the way He is continually meeting our needs after we are saved.

— One preacher who spoke on these verses was Alexander Maclaren. He not only preached one message; he preached one message on each of the

verses I am using today. He gave a definition of love in his second message, and I want to pass it on to you today. He said to the people in his congregation,

I need not remind you that the word 'grace' in Scripture means, first of all, the condescending love of God to inferiors, to sinners, to those who deserve something else; and, secondly, the whole fulness of blessing and gift and follow upon that love (Vol. 10, p. 394).

And one of those great blessings, one of the gifts of God's grace, is expressed in the words of that old hymn, "Strength I find to meet my trials here below." It is by the grace of God that we are what we are. We may not be all that we should be, but whatever we are that is pleasing to God is always the result of God's grace upon us and in us and through us.

Alexander Maclaren suggested in his message on verse 23 that Paul may have been working backward in that verse from the result to the cause. That is, faith associates itself with love, and this is what brings us peace. Maybe we could add to that the grace that Paul prayed for in verse 24, so that grace leads to faith, faith is joined with love, and peace follows.

We could also go in the other direction. We seek peace. The Lord deals with us about our love and our faith, and then we realize what an immeasurable store of grace is laid up for us to draw from day after day. Whichever way you go, there is blessing and blessing and more blessing.

As you sit there today, I don't know what your trials are, but you know, and the Lord knows. I know what mine are. But it is wonderful, isn't it, that God has promised us peace, and that His love has been shed abroad in our hearts, and that He alone can give us the faith we need, and then the grace that we knew when we were first saved is grace that is always sufficient for every need, every trial, that we have.

Now let me mention two more points from this text before I close. The first is:

III. THE OBJECT, OR PURPOSE, OF THIS PRAYER.

Perhaps I could bring it out best by pointing to the words "in sincerity" which you find in verse 24.

Translators have grappled with the right way to express the meaning of the word that Paul used here because it lit. means "in incorruption." I think that Dr. Salmond in the Expositor's Greek Testament has hit on the

real meaning of this expression when he said, quoting another writer, that “it is a love that ‘knows neither change, diminution, nor decay’ (Ell.)” (Vol. III, p. 395). And it would seem that what Paul was praying about the grace of God in their lives, would apply also to faith, love, and peace.

— Paul was not only praying that the people would experience the peace of God, the love of God, faith from God, and the grace of God, but that all four would continue, grow, and become increasingly prominent in their lives. The opposite would be for their peace, love, faith, and grace to become corrupt and change and decay. Their love for the Lord Jesus Christ needed to be, as it is expressed in the NIV, “an undying love.”

So this was the object of Paul’s prayer here at the end of the epistle. They had been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, but they needed to live out those blessings in an ever-increasing way, so that their lives would bring greater and greater glory to God.

This brings me to my last point:

IV. THE RESOURCES WE HAVE FOR SUCH A LIFE.

We all have struggled, and continue to struggle, in all four of these areas of life -- with peace, with love, with faith (trusting God), and with the grace we need day by day. We all know what it is to fail in these areas.

— How can we be helped so that we will be victorious where we have failed?

The first answer to that question is that we pray for each other as Paul prayed for the saints in his day. We need to pray this prayer for each other. And I am sure that I am right when I say that the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, are praying this very prayer for us as They intercede for us.

But the second answer has to do with the source of such blessings.

Notice that when Paul prayed for “peace to the brethren, and love with faith,” he said that it was to come to the brethren “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace is not something we work up by our own efforts in our hearts. Love is not generated by us, and neither is faith. We need to remember about all of the needs we have for the grace of God. They are not produced by us, but they come “from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

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What does this mean?

It means that the supply is inexhaustible. The resources are unlimited. However great our needs may be, the provision that we have in our heavenly Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ, will never run out. In fact, the supply is just as great today as it ever has been.

Concl: So you can see how important it is for us to look away from ourselves, and from other people, and look to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ. All we will ever need is found in Them, and will be ministered to us by the blessed Holy Spirit. Our sufficiency is not in ourselves, but in God.

When Frank James was here for our Bible Conference his first message was on the self-sufficiency of God -- that He has no needs. He doesn't need anything from us. But the opposite is the case with us. We are a bundle of needs which we are not able to meet. But God can, and He does over and over and over again! So we need to come to Him, and we need to pray, not just for ourselves, but for every saint we know. And as we look to the Lord for peace, and love, and faith, and grace, not only will the Lord meet our needs, but He will be changing us as He meets our needs, so that we will manifest in the way we live more of His peace, His love with faith, and His grace. Oh, for grace to trust the Lord more than we do. Let us pray that we shall.

A GRATEFUL APOSTLE WORSHIPS THE ETERNAL KING

1 Timothy 1:17

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Intro: Today I am concluding this present series on *The Prayers of the Apostle Paul*. This will be my thirty-fifth message on Paul's prayers. It has been a great blessing to me to prepare these messages, and I trust that the Lord has made them profitable to each one of you.

Before I get to the text which I have chosen for this final message, 1 Timothy 1:17, I want to comment on the unique greeting, or prayer of introduction which Paul made in the three Pastoral Epistles. Usually to the church he said something like this: "Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:2). But in these three Pastoral Epistles Paul wrote: "Grace, **mercy**, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Tim. 1:2). With minor variations, this is what he said in 2 Timothy and Titus, although some MSS of Paul's letter to Titus do not have "mercy."

The only other Bible writer who included all three of these was the Apostle John in 2 John 3:

Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

John wrote his second epistle to one he called "the elect lady and her children" (2 John 1). So at least we can say that this seems to have been the customary greeting for individuals, as opposed to churches. Even in his epistle to Philemon, Paul used only "grace...and peace," but the epistle was addressed to others in addition to Philemon, and even "to the church in thy house." So it seems that mercy was added to the usual prayer if it were intended only for an individual, and possibly for individuals like Timothy and Titus who were in the Lord's work.

Why is there this addition, this addition of "mercy" to the usual "grace" and "peace"?

Matthew Henry thought that it was because men in the ministry, due to the nature of their work, had a special need for mercy. Every believer needs the mercy of God, but perhaps, because of the special dangers and trials which men in the ministry face, this would explain why Paul added mercy to grace and peace. God deals with all of us in grace every day that we live, giving us blessing where we don't really deserve it, and the

— strength of grace to face circumstances and responsibilities which are too great for us. We also need the mercy of the Lord for our trials we face from day to day; we need our Lord's compassion. And also there are always so many things that can disturb us and upset us, that we have a constant need for the peace of God.

Paul certainly did not mean to indicate that the Lord's servants have a corner on the mercy of God and of Christ. In teaching the Pastoral Epistles on Tuesday I have brought out repeatedly that the Lord's servants are examples, and I believe that this would apply even in verses that make up Paul's greetings. Timothy and Titus were to be an encouragement to the people of God, and in their daily lives to show that whatever the people of God might need in their lives, there was grace, mercy, and peace sufficient for all of them.

Calvin thought that Paul included mercy with Timothy because of his special affection for Timothy. But that seems contrary to his greeting to Titus (if indeed "mercy" does not belong in the greeting to Titus) because it seems that with deep affection for Titus Paul addressed him as "mine own son after the common faith."

— I think we are safe in saying that men like Timothy and Titus who were "on the front lines of the battle," so to speak, had need of all of the grace, mercy, and peace that God would bestow upon them.

That is all I want to say about the greetings in the Pastoral Epistles, since there is that one addition of "mercy" which we do not ordinarily find in Paul's greetings.

However, today I want to take you to verse 17 of 1 Timothy 1, and I would call your attention to the fact that in chapter 6, verses 15 and 16 we have another statement about our Lord which is similar to what we have in chapter 1, verse 17.

I have given my message today the title, **A GRATEFUL APOSTLE WORSHIPS THE ETERNAL KING**. Verse 17 is a sudden expression of worship which came bursting forth from the heart of the Apostle Paul. Let us take a few moments to see if we can discover the reason for it.

— **I. THE REASON FOR THE APOSTLE PAUL'S SUDDEN EXPRESSION OF WORSHIP.**

In our study of Paul's prayers we have seen that it was not unusual for Paul to worship the Lord. The greatest example we have is the prayer recorded for us in Eph. 1:3-14. That is a prayer of worship from start to finish.

We can couple with that Paul's exhortations to all of us as the people of God to give thanks in everything, as well as those times when he tells us to rejoice in the Lord. *That which makes worshipers of us the recognition or the remembrance of what God has done for us in Christ. And that is the case here in 1 Tim. 1:17.* Look with me at the verses which immediately precede our text.

Verse 15 tells us that Paul was remembering that the Lord had saved him even though he considered himself to be the chief of sinners. He meant by this expression that if you were to make everybody line up in the order of the greatness of their sinfulness, he would have to stand first in the line! He meant that although every sinner needed the grace of God, yet he needed it more than anyone else! Here is Paul writing some thirty years after the Lord met him on the road to Damascus, and he is still amazed that the Lord would ever have seen fit to save him.

I think that this is true of most of us who have known the Lord for any time at all. The longer we know the Lord, the greater and more profound is our amazement that he would ever have had anything to do with us. Doesn't this strike a responsive chord in your heart? It does in mine! None of us was deserving of anything but the wrath of God, but instead, He saved us. And all through the years we have known Him, He has kept us; sometimes keeping us when we were anything but worth keeping. You may have been very young when you were saved, but you don't really understand the nature of your salvation if it doesn't humble you to think that the Lord would save you.

But Paul had another reason to worship the Lord.

Not only had the Lord saved him, but the Lord had put him in the ministry. Look at verse 12. And the reason that Paul was so overwhelmed by the fact that he had been put into the ministry was because of what he had been before he was saved. Let me read verse 13 to you again. (Read.)

And you will notice that in verse 14 Paul attributed the fact that he was in the ministry to "the grace of our Lord" and that through that grace he had received "faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." I am going to be speaking tonight about those two words, "faith and love." His faith to

trust the Lord, and his live for the Lord, had been given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

— So, his heart was overwhelmed with what the Lord had done for him, saving him, and then putting him in the ministry -- two great, great blessings, and Paul knew that he didn't deserve either one.

I like that expression, “**putting me into the ministry.**” I don't know how Paul became a Pharisee, nor how he became an ambitious young rabbi. But you can be sure that it was the work of God. God took him out of all that and put him into the ministry. He did not choose the ministry, or the apostleship, for himself; God put him into the ministry. You see, men don't choose the ministry; God chooses men and puts them into the ministry. It was a sad day for the work of the Lord when the ministry became a profession that men, and now women, would choose for themselves. None of the apostles were volunteers for the ministry; they were chosen and appointed by God for the work that the Lord had for them to do. That is the way it should be.

— And let me say to you young men who are here today: If the Lord wants to put you into the ministry, you will know it. And you won't be happy doing anything else if this is His appointment for you. The ministry today is short on men who are in the ministry because they know that they have been called by God for that work.

Anyway, I hope that you see the picture. Paul was reviewing in his own heart how amazing it was that the Lord had saved him, and then added to that was the fact that the Lord had put him into the ministry. This is what brought out the worship and adoration that was in his heart.

II. THE APOSTLE PAUL WORSHIPING THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (1 Tim. 1:17).

You might say, How do you know he was worshiping the Lord Jesus? Maybe he was worshiping God.

Well, he would worship Both the Father and the Son, but it seems from verse 16 that he was referring to our Lord Jesus, and if there is any doubt as to Who the King is, I remind you of those verses in chapter 6 I mentioned earlier: verses 15 and 16, reading verse 14 with them. (Read.)

— Notice first:

A. The Lord's Title: "the King."

The order of the words in the Greek is "to the King, the eternal (One). Our Lord is not just *a* King, *another* King, one of many. He is "**the King**." Borrowing Paul's words from 6:15, our Lord is "**the King** of kings, and Lord of lords." He is the Sovereign of the universe, the One Who exercises sovereign power over all men, over all angels. Some day He will show Himself to be "the King of kings, and Lord of lords," but He is that right now. Some day when He comes to reign on the earth, every knee shall bow before Him. Every king, every ruler, every president, every authority on earth and in heaven will bow before Him, the King of all kings, and the Lord of all lords.

Paul thought our Lord was only a man, Jesus of Nazareth. But he was to learn that our Lord was "the King." And his first words to the Lord on the road to Damascus were, "Who are thou, Lord?" And his second words were words of submission to the King: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Paul attributed his salvation, not to his own wisdom, not to the way he changed his own heart, but he attributed his salvation to the divine intervention in his life by the King, the Lord Jesus Christ! I hope that you and I realize that the same was true of us. *It was not that we found the Lord, but that the Lord found us! We weren't looking for Him, but He was looking for us! Oh, what grace, that the Lord of heaven and earth would think on us, and save us from our sins. Is it any wonder that Paul could not think of his salvation and not worship the Lord? Is your heart not moved in the same way?*

Now to our Lord's title as King, Paul added:

B. Four of His many glorious attributes.

Let us see what they mean.

1. "Eternal."

This means that our Lord always has been "the King," and furthermore, that He always will be King. There never has been anyone greater in power than our Lord Jesus Christ. Many have thought they were the greatest, but none has ever been capable of dethroning Him -- not even temporarily like Absalom chased his father David out of Jerusalem, and thought that he could kill him. Look at any period, at any nation, at any

individual who has ever lived, and always the Lord Jesus Christ has been King. He is King today, and He will be tomorrow, and in all of the tomorrows after that. And when time is no longer, He will forever be what has always has been, the Sovereign King of heaven and earth.

And may I remind you that He is my Sovereign and your Sovereign, too. And it was through the exercise of His sovereign power that He brought you to Himself, and saved you.

2. “Immortal.”

This goes along with the idea that He is eternal, but it adds the great truth that corruption will never touch Him. Many kings have started out well, but then corruption set in. That was true of some of the greatest kings of Judah. Even King David became corrupt because of his sin, and he died and his body saw corruption. Not so with our Lord Jesus Christ. He was without sin before He became a Man. He was without sin all of the time He was on earth as a Man. And it is impossible that He would ever be corrupted in any way because He is the Lord Jesus Christ -- and as Paul added to his greeting to Titus, He is “our Saviour.”

Oh, how secure we are if we are in Christ. He is “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). No scandal, no pride, no sin, no disqualifying characteristic will ever cause the downfall of our glorious King.

But He is not only eternal and immortal, but He is:

3. “Invisible.”

Notice what is said in 1 Tim. 6:16. (Read.) None of our Lord’s disciples ever saw the Lord in all of His glory. That takes greater sight than we have now. Besides if we saw Him today in His unveiled glory, we would not be able survive such an experience, His glory is so great. No, we can’t see Him, but He sees us. We think that we walk alone, but He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. And in our Lord’s glory He is able to be with us in the fulness of His Person just like He were nowhere else in all of the universe. He is here today even though we cannot see Him. And He is with us, teaching to us, guiding us, protecting us, and ministering to us moment by moment in countless ways. This is not make-believe; this is the greatest of all realities.

Finally, He is:

4. "The only God."

This seems to be the better reading. This does not mean that the Father is not God, or that the Holy Spirit is not God, but that there is no other God except Those we know to be God -- and the emphasis here is upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul had no idea that our Lord was God before he met Him on the road to Damascus. He thought He was only a man. Jesus Christ is Deity, a Member of the Godhead. There may be others who are called god, but they are all false gods. Jesus Christ is God, the Son of the Father, the final and complete revelation of God. God's final word of self-revelation was His Son.

The Devil may temporarily be "the god of this world," but He is totally under the authority, the sovereign authority, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the day is coming when the Devil's reign will be over, and He will be cast into the lake of fire forever and ever.

This doxology concluded by:

C. Honor and glory given to Him forever and ever.

We honor Him now, and we glorify Him now, but this is what we will be doing through all eternity. Only eternal honor and glory is sufficient for such an infinitely glorious God and Savior as we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Apostle Paul added a hearty, "Amen."

Concl: It would be interesting to know how many people have been led to Christ when they have heard His people praising Him and glorifying Him for salvation. Perhaps there are some here today, or some who will hear this message on the radio, who have never heard these things about our Lord. May God be pleased to use the truth of His Word to bring many to Himself.

For those of us who are Christians, this passage ought to make us realize how much we need to worship the Lord, not only because of what He has done for us, but because of what He is. When we begin to learn Who and what He is, then we will be more convinced than ever that what He has done can never be undone, and that our salvation is absolutely secure, for now, and for all eternity.

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S APPEAL FOR PRAYER

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2; Romans 15:30-33

Intro: In 1 Thess. 5:25 Paul wrote, “Brethren, pray for us.” But he did not specify any particular requests that he wanted them to bring before the Lord. But in 2 Thessalonians 3:1 he again wrote, “Finally, brethren, pray for us,” and in verses 1 and 2 he gave them two requests. Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians were probably written from Corinth some time in the years A.D. 50 and 51.

We have a similar passage in the book of Romans, chapter 15, verses 30 through 33, when again he specifically asked for prayer. At this time he was back in Corinth, and the date of Romans is some six or seven years later than the Thessalonian epistles. So it would probably be in A.D. 57. At that time he gave four requests for them to present to the Lord in prayer.

Jerry Bridges has emphasized in his messages to us this past week that the Apostle Paul was not only a man of prayer, a man who devoted much time every day to prayer, but when he wrote to the various churches it was not unusual for him to tell them *what* his burdens for them were.

It is very evident that the Spirit of God led Paul to include his prayers in his epistles, not just for our information as to what he prayed for, *but they are permanently recorded in Scripture as examples for us to follow*. And, as long as we sincerely make them our own, I don't know of any reason why we should not be praying his requests for each other. As Jerry pointed out this past week, there is a big difference between Paul's prayers and our prayers. Perhaps when we pray in private we come closer to the way Paul prayed and the requests he brought to the Lord. But, as I have said many times, the prayers of Scripture, OT and NT, are there to teach us to pray. How many times have you lifted a verse, or several verses, out of the Psalms, and made them a part of your prayers. I hope we all have done that. There is no better way to pray than to turn the Word of God into prayer. Even verses which are not necessarily a part of a prayer in Scripture, can be used as we come to the Lord. For example, if you were reading Psalm 1, you could pray that you would know the true happiness of those who do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor who stand in the way of sinners, or who sit in the seat of the scornful, but who delight in the Word of God and meditate in it continually – “day and night.”

When Paul prayed that the believers in Colosse “might be filled with the knowledge of His will,” God’s will, “in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,” he was praying that they would really grow in their understanding of the Word of God.

But we are thinking tonight, not about how Paul prayed for the different churches to whom he wrote his epistles, *but how he wanted them to pray for him*. Paul was not only an apostle, but he was a pioneer missionary. He was taking the Gospel where it had not gone before, at least in his generation. He was an evangelist in the Biblical meaning of that word. He was out on the front lines, taking the Gospel into territory where the Devil and heathen religions were dominant, and he knew that he had to have the blessing of the Lord upon his ministry. He could not open the eyes of those who were spiritually blinded. He never saved a single person in all of the years of his ministry. He proclaimed the Word, and God did the work.

Perhaps you remember how Paul expressed the nature of the Gospel ministry in his letter to the church at Corinth. I am thinking about 1 Cor. 3, verse 6 through 9. Listen to what he wrote to the Corinthian church:

6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building (1 Cor. 3:6-9).

Now he did not mean that what he and Apollos did was unimportant, unnecessary, but he did mean that what he and Apollos did would amount to absolutely nothing if they did not have the blessing of God upon them, if God was not using them to accomplish His divine purposes.

We are all just as dependent upon the Lord as Paul was. In fact, I would say that if Paul needed to trust the Lord for a fruitful ministry, how much more do we need the Lord to make us fruitful for His glory. Take any one of us by ourselves, and we are nothing. The Lord Jesus told His disciples before His death, when He was with them for the last time before the crucifixion,

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide

in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing (John 15:4-5).

This is why Paul said, “Brethren, pray for us.” He wanted the people of God in every place to be praying for him because he knew that if the Lord were not working in him and through him, all of his labors would be in vain.

Now tonight I am going to be moving back and forth between 2 Thess. 3 and Romans 15, so keep a finger in both places as we seek to learn how intensely Paul was seeking the support of his fellow-believers in prayer.

First notice with me how Paul expressed his desire for prayer, especially in the Thessalonian epistles. He said,

I. “BRETHREN, PRAY FOR US” (1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1).

When he said, “Brethren,” he was not limiting what he had to say to the men, but he meant the sisters also. He surely wanted the men to pray, but he was speaking to all of the believers. It would include young people who knew the Lord, and also the children. You see, “brethren” is a family word. Paul was speaking to all in Thessalonica who knew the Lord. He wanted every Thessalonian who was in the family of God, to be praying. You see, those of us who are trusting in Christ as our Savior are the only ones on earth who can really pray. Prayer is our privilege in God’s family. Only we can truly say, “Our Father.” Paul told the Galatian churches, “Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). But if your faith is not in Christ Jesus, you are not a son of God. It is very important to know this.

But what is prayer? Prayer is talking to God. There are many kinds of prayer, but Paul was talking about intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is prayer for others. We pray for ourselves, and we need to do that. But Paul was asking for an interest in their prayers. He felt the need for their support in the work that the Lord had called him to do.

But notice that he did not simply say, “Pray for me,” but “pray for us.” Both of Paul’s letters to the church at Thessalonica begin like this: “Paul,

and Silvanus, and Timotheus unto the church of the Thessalonians.” Silvanus is another way of saying Silas, and Timotheus was Timothy. They made up a very strong team, but not strong enough to go ahead unless they had the blessing of the Lord. And God gives His blessing when His people come to Him in prayer.

There is a lot to think about in just those four words: “Brethren, pray for us.” It tells us a great deal about the Apostle Paul himself. Regardless of how many times he had preached the Gospel, or how many people he had seen drawn to Christ, he felt himself to be in daily need of the prayers of the people of God, enlisting the blessing of the Lord, that he and his co-workers might be useful in bringing people to Christ, and in seeing the people of God growing in grace and in their knowledge of Christ. And he was just as desirous of seeing the Lord’s blessing upon Silas and Timothy as he was to have it upon himself. And so he said, “Brethren, pray for us.”

But now let us look at the Romans passage to see how Paul described the praying that he was looking for. Here he requested that “for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together in your prayers to God for me.” He described the prayer support that he wanted,

II. A STRIVING TOGETHER (Rom. 15:30).

Here, in contrast with the Thessalonian letters, he was seeking God’s blessing for himself, not selfishly, but because he was thinking particularly of his own ministry. He was calling upon them because he was really doing the business of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was motivated by the love of God which had been shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit, as he had mentioned in Rom. 5:5. It was not a natural thing for a man like Paul to be so deeply concerned about people who did not know the Lord. But his burden had come from the Lord Jesus Christ and from the Holy Spirit.

But what did Paul mean by *striving together in prayer*?

The basic word that Paul used here is the Greek word from which we get our word, *agonize*. It speaks of the intensity with which two athletic teams would contend with each other for the victory. Paul was talking

about teamwork in prayer. Paul described the nature of our conflict in Eph. 6:10-20. We are engaged in spiritual conflict with the forces of evil, and it is by prayer that we seek and get the sovereign, all-powerful assistance of our God and heavenly Father. Paul called such prayer,

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,

20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:18-20).

This is how Paul said that Epaphras prayed for the Colossian believers, “always laboring fervently for you in prayers” (Col. 4:12). Jacob was striving with God in prayer when he told the Lord, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26). The Syrophenician woman was laboring fervently when she came to the Lord seeking help for her demon-possessed daughter. The Lord said that He had only come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and that it was not right to take the children’s bread, and give it to the dogs. She came back by saying, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table” (Matt. 15:27). That was enough for the Lord. He answered her by saying,

O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour (Matt. 15:28).

“Striving together” is importunate prayer. It is when we continue to pray when it appears that God is reluctant to give us what we are seeking from Him. But His seeming reluctance is to test our faith, and by persevering the blessing we seek is given.

Paul was indicating also by his use of the word “together,” that there is power in united prayer.

But now let us look quickly at the requests.

III. PAUL’S PRAYER REQUESTS.

In the Romans passage Paul indicated that he was asking them to join with him in prayer. And he certainly could have prayed alone. But he sought their fellowship, their support, in prayer, indicating that there was

power in united prayer, and this was what Paul was seeking.

A. The first request (2 Thess. 3:1).

It had to do with the Word of God. How had it been glorified among the Thessalonians? See 1 Thess. 2:13. (Read.) Too often people dismiss the Bible as an ancient book which really has no meaning for us today. But that was not the case in Thessalonica! And God was the One Who deserved the praise because of what happened.

What did Paul mean when he want them to pray that the Word would have “free course”? *To have free course* is in the Greek a verb which means *to run*, but to run with every obstacle removed – like a runner on a race track where there are no barrier to slow him down.

This parallels Paul’s request in Rom. 15:31 where he asked the Roman church to pray “that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints.” However, in 2 Thessalonians Paul was thinking about how the unsaved would respond to the Gospel. Only God could open their hearts, and He could, and would! But it would come about in answer to prayer. How wonderful it is to see those times when the work of the Lord moves ahead in high gear, so to speak! That is what Paul wanted.

Now in order for this to happen, Paul made another request, and it is in both passages that we are considering tonight.

C. A request for deliverance from unregenerate men who would stand in the way (1 Thess. 3:2; Rom. 15:31).

It was never the case with our Lord that everyone who heard Him, put their trust in Him. Nor did Paul always see everyone saved as He preached the Gospel. There were always those who stood in the way. Paul called them unbelievers because they did not have faith, they were unreasonable, and wicked. An “unreasonable” person is one who is out of place, one who does that which is inappropriate, unnatural, and disgusting. “Wicked” means that they are men whose influence is nothing but evil.

The scribes and Pharisees filled this place in the ministry of our Lord.

And everywhere that the Apostle went, there were those who stood in the way of what he was trying to do. And so it always is with the ministry of the Word. Paul told the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 16:9, "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." God is the only One Who can restrain the enemies of the Gospel and bless the message to the hearts of those who, by God's grace, want to hear.

Two requests remain.

D. Paul asked for prayer for his own state of mind as he came to them (Rom. 15:32a).

This was always a concern of his. He wanted to come at the right time, *i.e.*, when it was the will of God, the Lord's time. But he also wanted to come in the right frame of mind: "with joy." There is nothing that gives joy to a true servant of the Lord like seeing the blessing of God upon his ministry. The Devil has many ways that he employs to seek to take away our joy in the Lord, and we must not be ignorant of his devices.

The last request was for:

E. A mutual refreshing (Rom. 15:32b).

This speaks of the blessing that comes from the fellowship that believers have with each other in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had expressed in chapter 1 of this epistle that this refreshing would be in the plan of God when he was able to visit them. See what he said in Rom. 1:11 and 12. (Read.)

We need to remember that those who minister the Word to us need blessing just as much as anyone else does. And so it should be the desire of the minister that those who hear him will not only be blessed by him, but will themselves be a blessing to him who instructs them in the Word.

Concl: What a wonderful list of prayer requests we have here, and I bring these to you tonight as Lucille and I, Gary and Martha, leave for Japan tomorrow. We ask you to strive with us in your prayers for us that any hindrances to the blessing of the Lord will be removed, that the people to whom we minister will be receptive to the truth. And that we will go in the fulness of the blessing to Christ to experience a wonderful

time of refreshment and blessing in our fellowship with those dear Japanese believers. Tim said that it may be that Lucille will have a special meeting with the ladies. Pray for the Lord's leading in that possibility. We want to be an encouragement to Tim and Machiko and their family, and we trust that the Lord will have some special blessings for the four of us also.

But just as Paul linked his mission to Rome and to other places as well with the prayers of the people, we trust that you will stand with us by your prayers for the glory of the Lord. Pray that we may go in the fulness of the Lord's blessing, and return the same way. And may all of the glory for any good that is done be laid at the feet of our loving heavenly Father and His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.