

MORE SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Ephesians 1:5-7

Intro: In our study of Paul's prayers we have come to his epistle to the Ephesians. A careful reading of chapter 1 will indicate that the whole chapter, with the exception of verse 1, is made up of several prayers. Verse 2 is a prayer. Verses 3 through 14 is a prayer of worship and thanksgiving combined. Verses 15 through 23 give us Paul's prayer of intercession for the believers at Ephesus.

We are not considering verse 2 because we have had it, or prayers very similar to it in all of Paul's epistles. But we are looking in some detail into Paul's prayer of worship and thanksgiving in verses 3 through 14. It is too important to pass over as quickly as I would have to if I were to consider all of it in one message. So last Sunday we examined verses 3 and 4; today I want to consider verses 5 through 7 with you.

In this prayer the Apostle Paul was not only thanking God, but he was worshipping God for the "spiritual blessings" that we all have in Christ. And we have "all" of them! Not one of them is missing in any of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. He mentioned many of the "spiritual blessings" we have in this chapter, but not all of them. What did he mean by "spiritual blessings"?

"Spiritual blessings" are those blessings bestowed upon us by God which make us fully acceptable to God. They are the blessings by which we have been saved, and they are the blessings which guarantee that we will not only continue to be saved, but that God's purpose in saving us will be fulfilled in all of His people. These blessings include everything from our election in eternity past to our glorification in eternity to come. And so, at the head of the list, is our election by God for salvation "before the foundation of the world. The purpose for which God chose us was that we should "be holy and without blame before him," i.e., before God. And this marvelous work of salvation is all in Christ. It is by our union with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and life that we can be assured that God's purpose in saving us will be completed. But now let us go on to verse 5. Here we come to the equally great doctrine of predestination.

I. THE GREAT DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION (Eph. 1:5).

Last week I mentioned to you that many of the reliable commentators who have written on the book of Ephesians, believe that the words, "in

love,” at the end of verse 4 in the KJV, should go with verse 5. The NIV translates it this way, and so does the NASB. It was “in love” that God “predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself.” In the whole work of salvation God was moved by the love in His heart toward those whom He had chosen. It was not because He saw anything attractive in us. In fact, everything that God saw in us before we were saved would repulse Him. He is so holy that He cannot look upon sin. Habakkuk had this to say about God: “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...” (Hab. 1:13). And so God was moved to save us, not because of anything in us, but because of His astonishing love for us.

What does the word “predestination” mean? The way this verb, προορίζω, is used in the NT will help us to learn what it means. Notice we have it again in verse 14. (Read.) Basically it means to determine something beforehand, or to ordain.

Peter used this word in Acts 4:28. Let me read it and verse 27 with it so you can get what Peter was talking about:

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,
28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel **determined before** to be done (Acts 4:27-28).

We also have this same word used in 1 Cor. 2:7. Let me read verse 8 with it:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God **ordained before** the world unto our glory:
8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:7-8).

When God ordains anything, He sovereignly decrees that it will in fact take place. He establishes by His decree that what He ordains will come to pass.

The best-known verses where this verb is used are Rom. 8:29, 30 where we have the verb used two times. And let me read verse 28 with these two verses:

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did **predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did **predestinate**, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom 8:28-30).

“Foreknow” is used in verse 29 in the sense of electing. He foreknows everything in the sense of knowing ahead of time. So that meaning would not fit here. What Paul was saying that those whom the Lord chose, He predestinated, He decreed, He determined beforehand, that they would “be conformed to the image of his Son.”

But what Paul was saying here in Eph. 1 was that God has determined that all whom God had chosen would not only “be holy and without blame before” Himself, but He has decreed for His chosen ones, “the adoption of children by Jesus Christ,” again, “to himself.”

Now there is a very wonderful truth here, but personally I feel that this is a very unfortunate translation. In the first place, it suggests that we are the adopted children of God. And the verse is almost always interpreted this way by the commentators.

But let me ask you some questions. I don’t suppose it is news to any true child of God who is here today that you are a member of the family of God. But how did you get into the family of God? Were you adopted into God’s family? It seems to me that the Bible teaches us that we were born into the family of God. Let me read John 1:12, 13 to you:

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 **Which were born**, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but **of God**.

The Greek word for “sons” in verse 12 is τέκνα, which really means children, or born ones. It means that we are the offspring of God. We are true, genuine children of God. There is no adoption at all.

Paul used the word υιοθεσία which actually means a son-placing. It is a word which Paul explains fully in his letter to the churches of Galatia. It describes the difference between a child of God before the death of Christ, and a child of God after the work of the Lord was completed. A child of God in OT times was like a minor child in a family. A child of God since the death of Christ has given to Him all of the rights of being a son, a child who has come of age. We would say, “a son with all the

rights and privileges of being a true, genuine son of God. It is not referring to spiritual growth, but to spiritual rights and privileges.

One place where this difference is seen in the privilege we have of access to God. Under the Law it was limited. The veil was hanging between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. But when Christ died the veil was rent, and now we have the right to enter with confidence and assurance into the very presence of our heavenly Father at any time and in any place. In OT times the Lord Jesus said that Holy Spirit had been “with” the people of God; since Christ died the Holy Spirit permanently indwells every child of God, and He will be there forever--even though there are times when we grieve the Holy Spirit.

And so Paul says that God decreed not only our salvation from sin’s penalty and power, but He decreed also that we would be true and genuine and permanent member of His family--not by adoption, but by birth.

God could have saved us without doing this for us. Even OT saints were the children of God, but you don’t find the emphasis on this truth in the OT that you do in the NT. And the reason for that is that they were like minor children in the family; we have all the rights and privileges of a son in a family. And all of this is not because we were worthy, but it is **“according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”** Or it could be translated, Which He (God) has freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved One (Christ).

We are the children of God, not first and foremost because we wanted to be, but because God wanted us in His family. When all of us were born, our parents had to take what they got. They had no choice in the matter. But when we were born into the family of God, God was getting what He wanted; He was getting those whom He had chosen! Is it any wonder that Paul began this praise of worship and thanksgiving with the words, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”?

Listen to the familiar words of the Apostle John when he spoke of our place in the family of God when he wrote the first two verses of 1 John 3:

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons (τέκνα) of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons (τέκνα) of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that,

when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

— And we need to remember now that this is not something that we can glory in for ourselves, as though we deserved this, but we must glorify the God of grace and remember that it was His beloved Son, Who by His death, purchased this unspeakable privilege for us. We were “the children (τέκνα) of wrath”; now we are “the children of God.” And to God be the glory--all of it!

But let me take up one more spiritual blessing before I close. You will find this in verse 7.

II. THE GREAT DOCTRINE OF REDEMPTION (Eph. 1:7).

Notice the present tense, “have.” This is not something we will have when we get to heaven, but we have it now!

“Redemption” speaks of a “deliverance effected through the death of Christ from the retributive wrath of a holy God and the merited penalty of sin” (Thayer under ἀπολύτρωσις, p. 65).

— It is so easy to read over these words without realizing the terrible nature of our guilt before God. All of us deserved the utmost of God’s wrath, but our blessed Savior took our sins upon Himself, suffered the penalty that belonged to us, and so fully satisfied God by the shedding of His precious blood that we are “forgiven” -- RELEASED FOREVER FROM THE PENALTY AND POWER OF SIN. We are pardoned! Our sins will not be remembered against us anymore. And God does what we cannot do: He even forgets our sins. And all of this is because of the infinite value of the death of our Savior.

And it is all because of “the riches of his (God’s) grace.” By God’s grace the death of Christ was not just enough to cover our sins; it would have been sufficient if our sins had been a million times more than they are! Oh, the glory of that statement: “the riches of His grace.”

— Christ did not pay just enough to redeem us, but His death was so much over and beyond what our sins required that He could have saved not only the whole world by His death, but millions of world’s just like ours! Never fear that the death of Christ fails to cover some of your sins. I am not excusing your sins, nor am I excusing mine. But I am saying that we can never exhaust the grace of God regardless of how many or how

terrible our sins may have been. God's grace is forever greater than all our sins.

This is why we never need to know how great a sinner a person might be before we can feel safe in encouraging him to trust in Christ. Paul said that he was the chief of sinners. By this he meant that if the Lord could save him, the Lord could save anyone. No sinner has fallen so low but what the grace of God can reach him, and save him, and lift him up to the heavenlies in Christ.

Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan;
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man;
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary.

Concl: By God's grace He chose us. By God's grace He has brought us into His family as sons. And by His grace we have been redeemed from the penalty and power of our sins, and we have been forgiven, released from all the charges that stood against us. And it is all because God in that same wonderful grace sent His Son to die an awful death on the Cross, shedding His precious blood, and all for our eternal salvation.

Paul was speaking of all of the believers in his day. (Read the passage -- verses 3 through 7, noting the times he said "our," "us," and "we.") And so he was speaking for us today. We have the same need. Our sins require the same salvation. It was only Christ Who could save sinners then, and it is only Christ Who can save sinners today. It is all according to "his will," and by "his grace," and because our Lord shed "his blood."

Therefore, his thanksgiving should be ours, and his worship of the our holy and gracious God, should be ours as we learn of the "spiritual blessings" we have in Christ.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

Ephesians 1:8-12

Intro: Today I want to consider with you the third part of Paul's prayer in Eph. 1:3-14 -- this wonderful prayer of worship and praise. We will be looking at verses 8 through 12.

The appropriate title for this prayer is "Spiritual Blessings" -- that is, the blessings which God has bestowed upon us in salvation. These are the blessings which we have because of the infinitely wise and gracious plan which was ordained by the three Members of the Godhead before the foundation of the world. The Father ordained it and chose those who would be saved. The Son died for those whom the Father chose, and the Holy Spirit is the One Who brings us to Christ.

Prior to verse 8 where we will begin today, we have seen that the Apostle Paul was blessing God that we were not only chosen, but chosen to "be holy and without blame before Himself. We have seen that God decreed that we would become members of His family, not adopted, but brought into His family with all the rights and privileges of those who are sons of God. We have seen that we now, in this present time, are redeemed, and that our sins are forgiven. Any one of these blessings would be sufficient for a whole session of praise to the Lord.

One thing I cannot emphasize too strongly or too much is that every blessing we have in our salvation is traceable to Christ. It is because He came into the world as a Man, suffered and died as our Substitute, that we have all of these spiritual blessings. We were chosen in Him. We are sons of God "by Jesus Christ." We are accepted in Him. In Him we have redemption through His blood, and the forgiveness of our sins. It is all traceable to the grace of God which has been bestowed upon us in Christ. If Christ is taken away, we have nothing. Nobody ever has found acceptance with God, and no one ever will, except in Christ! And I am not speaking just of His birth, nor of His perfect life. Those showed that He was fully qualified to suffer and die in our behalf. It is by His death that we have these blessings, and His resurrection proves that what He did on the Cross has fully satisfied God, leading to our fully acceptance with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us see what else had caused Paul to offer his worship and thanksgiving to God. I can state it in one simple sentence: God has seen fit to show us what He is yet going to do for us. What Paul has declared about our salvation up through verse 7 has to do with the past -- the things that

God has already done. We were chosen, and we have been saved. Our goal for the present is to seek to be “holy and without blame” before God. We are in His family. We have the full and free and eternal forgiveness of our sins. But, when we get to verse 8 we see that the Lord wants us to know about the future. He called this, “the mystery of his will.” This does not mean that there is something mysterious about our salvation. The word “mystery” means a secret. Paul was about to mention two things that had not been fully disclosed until after Christ died. Let me call it what Paul called it in verse 10:

I. “THE DISPENSATION OF THE FULNESS OF TIMES” (Eph. 1:8-10).

We who know the Lord ought to remember that we are the only ones who have any certain knowledge about what is going to take place in the future. Do you realize that? We hear people talking all of the time like they know what is going to happen, but the Bible is the only reliable source in all of the universe for such information.

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We may not know all that we would like to know. We have to say with the Apostle John that “it doth not yet appear what we shall be” (1 John 3:2). He knew that we are going to be like the Lord, but there are many details about that which we do not know.

We also have to say with the Apostle Paul that “now we see through a glass darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). And yet we believe that God has given us an abundance of truth in His Word regarding the future which none of us will ever be able to understand fully. Look at verse 8. Paul was rejoicing that God “hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”

“Abounded” means that He has given us enough and to spare (Strong). He has exceeded our greatest expectations, and certainly far beyond anything that we could ever deserve. And He had done this “in all wisdom and prudence.” What did Paul mean?

I am not going to say that I know everything that he meant, but we at least can have a good idea of what he was thinking. Lenski defines “wisdom” as “the penetrating insight into divine realities” (The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians, p.369). And he added to this “prudence,” which we can define as the God-given ability to apply to our lives the truth which God has made known to us. Paul is here speaking of the Gospel. The Gospel itself was not a secret (or no one would have been saved in OT times). But there

are many things about the Gospel that had to wait for the coming of Christ before they could be revealed. Now they have been made known, and they are for us to understand and enjoy.

- “Having made known unto us” is a statement as to how we got our Bible, and the NT in particular. God made it known to us. He revealed it. And He revealed “the mystery of his will,” aspects of the Gospel never known before, which were “according to his good pleasure.”

Do you remember seeing that expression back in verse 5. There it had to do with our becoming members of His family. He didn’t decree that because He had to, nor even because he was in any way reluctant to do so. He did it because nothing else would please and satisfy Him. As amazing as it sounds, He wants us in His family. In the same way He did not reveal His will reluctantly. And he certainly did not plan to do what He revealed with any sense of hesitation. He delighted to make this a part of His plan, and He had equal joy in telling us about it.

If you and I only knew how the Lord delights in His Word, in His promises, in His plans, in His truth, we would spend much more time reading it than we do.

- In addition, God’s good pleasure also means that there is much good for us in what God has included in His divinely ordained plan. In the same way when we look back at verse 5, God wanted us in His family because He knew that it would be good for us! And to assure that His plan would be carried out in full, He did not leave it up to us! He has purposed it in Himself, meaning that He made Himself personally responsible to see that everything about our salvation was carried out in full.

Is it any wonder that Paul’s heart was overflowing with worship and thanksgiving to God?

What is this about His will in salvation which became a secret, a mystery, revealed? We have the answer in verse 10. (Read.)

- The words, “That he might gather together in one,” are the translation of one Greek verb, and it means that God “in the dispensation of the fulness of times” is going to “bring together for himself...all things and beings (hitherto disunited by sin) into one combined state of fellowship in Christ, the universal bond” (Thayer, p. 39). Of course, this has to do with His chosen ones, His redeemed ones. In Romans 8 Paul taught that even creation itself is groaning as it waits for the manifestation of the sons of

God. This is the first time there will be true unity among the people of God. There will be unity among all of the saints -- OT and NT. There is going to be a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. We don't know all that we think we know about the eternal state, but we do know that whatever distinctions there might be, there will be perfect unity among all of the people of God -- the answer to our Lord's prayer in John 17.

What a day that will be! Men have always tried to bring about their own form of unity, but most of them that I have known about have been at the expense of the truth of the Word of God. But this passage indicates that God will bring it about, and that it will be in full accord with all of the teachings of God's Book in which He has made known, at least in part, what is yet to come for the blessing of the people of God. And all of this will be "in Him, i.e., in Christ." Old Testament saints and New Testament saints will have one common meeting ground: **CHRIST!** I repeat: What a day that will be!

But we still have more to learn about the future, truth which God has made clearer than ever in the writings of the New Testament. It is this:

II. OUR PERSONAL DESTINY (Eph. 1:11, 12).

We as the sons of God have an inheritance. It is guaranteed because it is "predestinated according to the purpose of him [God] who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." This is God's decree. This is unchanging and unchangeable purpose. This is His will.

"Purpose" and "counsel" are both words which suggest a purpose. But the difference is that "purpose" has in mind that which God determined beforehand to do; "counsel" shows how intent God is in accomplishing what He determined to do. What was it? Verse 12 gives us our answer. (Read.)

"That we should be" [Gk., εἰς τὸ εἶναι) suggests both a condition, and its permanence. And when we speak of condition, it is important that we understand character. The only way that we can ever be drawn together is by being conformed to the likeness of our Savior. Even now, the more we are like Him, the greater will be our oneness, our true fellowship.

However, we often think in terms of our likeness to Christ in terms of what it is going to me to us. That is not the point that Paul was making here. As good and pleasant as it will be for us to be like the Lord Jesus,

the purpose of God in salvation is that we should be “to the praise of **his** glory.” This is as it should be. People will look at us (and perhaps angels will do the same), but they will glorify God because of what they see in us. It will become apparent then, as never before, that our glory, the manifestation of our God-likeness, is not the result of anything that we have done, but it is the work of God in us. And so the praise belongs to Him. God’s glory is the sum of all His attributes. They will be displayed in us, not to the extent of making us Deity, but so that others will see Christ in us.

See verses 6 and 14.

“Who first trusted in Christ” -- Lit., this is, who first hoped in Christ. There are two outstanding interpretations of this expression which deserve our consideration.

First is the obvious fact that Paul was speaking of himself and his readers. The church was very young. Paul, although not a believer when the Lord was on earth, yet probably was saved a year or two after the Lord’s ascension. Before he was saved, as he wrote later to Timothy, he was “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1 Tim. 1:13). He had specifically “persecuted the church of God, and wasted it” (Gal. 1:13; cf. also Phil. 3:6). When the Lord met Paul on the road to Damascus, he was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” and had letters in his possession permitting him, if he found any followers of Christ “whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1, 2). The believers in Judaea soon heard

23 That he which persecuted us in times past now
preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.

24 **And they glorified God in me** (Gal. 1:23b-24).

This is what Paul had been thinking about as he wrote out his thanksgiving to the Ephesians: “And they glorified God in me.” They knew that even as Paul was then, newly saved and changed, only God could have done it. And so they gave God the glory.

Paul never forgot what he had been before he had hoped in Christ -- and he always regretted it. But the marvel to him was that God had saved him with the certain prospect that some day everything about him would be “to the praise of God’s glory.”

But think for a moment about the Ephesians. They were worshipers of the great goddess Diana. They had been raised to know nothing else. But

the Gospel came to Ephesus, and many of them were saved. The changes that had taken place up to that time were truly amazing, but to think that some day they, too, would be perfectly conformed to Christ, was equally overwhelming. Only God could have made the difference in them as it was then. What would they be like when His work in them was completed? It would all be to the praise of God's glory, not for their glory.

These ideas are probably what Paul had in mind.

But others think that he may have been considering all who would trust in Christ before the Lord comes. That is a possibility, too, and the same hope would be theirs.

Concl: But let us turn our thoughts upon ourselves. The miracle of God's work in us is just as great. When you think what we were when the Lord saved us, and the prospect that we would only get worse as time went on, how great should be our praise that we have learned of the Lord's grace in choosing us, then sending Christ to die for our sins, and during our lifetime He sought us, saved us, and has been keeping us every day since then, never ceasing His gracious work in our hearts. But we need to be just as amazed that we are destined by the sovereign and unfailing purpose of God to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Then we will be blameless and faultless before God -- and all of it will be to the praise of His glory.

So Paul's praise can be our praise. We can worship our loving and gracious heavenly Father just as sincerely and constantly as Paul did. And although we know that now we are far from being what even we know we need to be, and often feel our great inadequacy when it comes to living a holy life, yet we know our destiny is certain because it rests on the purpose of God and His faithfulness. We thank Him for all that He has done for us so far, and we can praise Him also that some day His work in us will be complete, and He will look upon us as being absolutely perfect in Christ.

As we come to the Lord's Table, we are responsible to examine our hearts before God. Let us make sure that we are saved, and if not, what better time and place than to trust the Lord Jesus here and now. May the Lord enable us to see our need before Him today, and to look to Him through our Lord Jesus Christ Who shed His blood to save sinners, that He might meet our need.

SECURE IN CHRIST

Ephesians 1:13, 14

— **Intro:** We come today to the last two verses of this great prayer we have been considering for the past three Sundays. I trust that the Lord has blessed you in even a small way in which He has blessed me in going over these great truths once again. And I have no hesitation in saying that the measure of blessing we have experienced will be displayed in the way we share with Paul in his thanksgiving to God. If, after considering all of the great truths contained in this passage, thanksgiving to God for your salvation does not occupy a greater place in your prayers, then I have failed to accomplish what I had hoped to do. But if your heart is full of praise to God for saving you, and if you can't pray without including some word of thanksgiving to God for saving you, then I will be satisfied although I know that all of the praise belongs to God alone. Everybody, saved or not, has many, many reasons for which to give God thanks, but those of us who know the Lord Jesus as our Savior, have more reasons than anyone else. So let us make every day thanksgiving day for God's grace in saving us.

— During the first rain storm that we had a couple of weeks ago, water got into our basement, and we had water in our laundry room where our furnace is, and it got into our "bodega" as well. I came home that Saturday morning after our men's prayer meeting to find Lucille moving things into our downstairs family room so that the wet things could dry out, and so we could clean up the laundry room. By that time no more water was coming in, and the level of the water in the laundry room had gone down until there was very little there.

As we moved things out, we came across a box of tapes that we had stored away, and I was very interested in going through them to see what was there. Among the tapes was a series of messages given by Dr. Bob Smith of Bethel College in Minneapolis or St. Paul. He have delivered them at Cannon Beach one summer. I don't remember the date, and the date is not given on the tapes, but it was many years ago. Lucille and I were there for just the beginning of the series. Since we could not stay for the whole week, I ordered the series, and this is what I found during the clean-up of our basement.

— His second message was on, believe it or not, this prayer at the beginning of Ephesians 1. And he made a couple of statements about this prayer that I want to pass on to you today. Dr. Smith was the Professor of Philosophy, and possibly Bible, at Bethel College. I don't know if he is

still there or not. But he was a man who had done a lot of reading in ancient philosophy and history as well as a man deeply taught in the Word of God. But this is what he said about Eph. 1:3-14. He said that to his knowledge nothing greater had ever been written than this section -- the greatest in the Bible itself, and that in this passage nothing surpassed verses 3 and 4. He put these verses at the top of the Bible, and at the top of all literature as well.

We shouldn't be surprised at that, especially that he would consider something in the Bible as the greatest of all, but I was interested that he would put this ahead of everything else in Scripture. He gave it that place because it speaks of God's work in salvation, of which the Bible is the ultimate authority, but also because it speaks of God's purpose in saving us. As we saw, and still can see in verse 4, the Lord saved us, not just to deliver us from hell and eternal punishment, but "that we should be holy and without blame before him." And, as Paul brought out later in his prayer, this means that we are predestined to "be to the praise of his glory," which ultimately means, as we learn from other passages that God has saved us to make us like His Son! I am sure that you would agree with me when I say that there is nothing more incredible than this, and nothing more glorious. As the Apostle John said, even though we know that "we shall be like him, that is, like Christ, yet "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." That is, we don't know fully the extent of this. We don't know all that it will mean to us. We do know that it will mean that we will not longer have anything to do with sin, but beyond that we are going to have to wait until we get to heaven and see the Lord before we will understand this great truth perfectly. But it is certainly true that nothing could be better than this! This is not a fairy tale; this is the absolute truth of God. But God does not wait until we go to heaven, or until the Lord Jesus comes for us, to begin making this change. It started when we were saved. It continues on right now in the life of each one who truly knows the Savior. And it will be finished at the coming of the Lord. Even those who are with the Lord today are not fully glorified because a major part of our glorification has to do with our bodies. The work is going to be finished for all of us at the same time, or almost at the same time when "the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." That is our hope, our certain hope, and it may not be very far away!

But now I want to go down to the end of the prayer, to verses 13 and 14, and I want to raise and answer a question. It is this: What if after all that we have experienced in Christ, and have received from God through

Christ, we could lose it all? There are many of the Lord's people who believe that we can. What do you believe?

— Well, in answering that question let me point out that we have been looking at salvation as a work of God, a sovereign God, a God of grace, a God Who controls human history, a God Who is so mighty that no one can stand against. If we had nothing in Scripture but what it tells us about God, we would have to admit that our salvation is perfectly secure -- that if a person is truly saved, genuinely saved, he will never know again what it is to be unsaved, to be lost in sin.

But we have other proofs in Scripture, many which Paul did not even refer to in this prayer, but he did conclude by mentioning one that should help all of us to see that once we are saved, we can never lose our salvation. We can never lose the hope that someday we are not only going to be with the Lord, but that we are going to be like the Lord! What is the guarantee? It is in the sealing of the Holy Spirit. (Read vv. 13 and 14.)

Let us think for a few moments about:

I. THE SEALING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Eph. 1:13).

— Sometimes it is important to note what the Scriptures do not say as well as what they say. For example, Paul did not tell the believers at Ephesus that they needed to seek to be sealed with the Spirit. Neither did he indicate that some were sealed and others were not sealed. He said that after they believed, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Nobody is sealed who does not believe, but all who believe are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

“Were sealed” is passive, and so it can't mean that they sealed themselves. It is the Holy Spirit Who does the sealing and Paul indicates that it had already taken place in the lives of those who truly believed. So we can say that every believer is NOW sealed by the Spirit.

— My Dad worked for many years as the Treasurer of the Western Steel Casting Company. The company had plants in Seattle, Tacoma, Everett, and Portland. In order for my Dad to take care of some of the business that came to him, it was necessary for him to be a Notary Public. This allowed him to sign legal papers, verifying that they were in order, and that the signatures attached to them were genuine. After he checked the papers and witnessed the signing, he would put his notary seal on the document. The seal was made by pressing into the paper his own autho-

rization as a Notary Public. I am sure most of us have had experience with such seals.

— In Bible times the seal was often made in wax. Charles Hodge in his commentary on Ephesians said that a seal had at least three purposes:

- 1) It authenticated or confirmed that something was genuine and true.
- 2) It marked something as belonging to a certain person.
- 3) It rendered that which was sealed as secure.

When we apply this to the sealing work of the Holy Spirit we can see that all three of these apply:

- 1) It identifies a person as a true believer in Christ.
- 2) It indicates that we belong to God.
- 3) It guarantees the permanence of our relationship to God. In other words, it means that nothing can ever take away or change our salvation.

— We are not only sealed by the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit Himself is the seal. His presence in our lives marks us as true believers, it indicates that we belong to God, and it is absolute proof that our salvation is secure. So this means that we cannot lose what we have in Christ. It is ours for all eternity. We can never again be lost. We can't go back to our former state. And the Holy Spirit comes to us as God's seal to confirm the work of Christ in our behalf.

What peace this brings to our hearts! How this should humble us! What carefulness it should produce in us that all of our energies are directed toward the goal that we have in our salvation -- to be made like our Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is called "the Holy Spirit of promise" both because He is the Person Who came at Pentecost as "the promise of the Father," and because He is the One Who secures the promise of God which has to do with our salvation. We trusted in Christ after we heard the Word of truth, which is the Gospel of our salvation. And when we believed, we were sealed, sealed immediately, and sealed forever! And remember: the Holy Spirit is the seal.

But when we go to the last verse of this prayer, we learn something else that is very wonderful. It has to do with an added idea in our salvation. Paul called it,

— **II. "THE EARNEST OF OUR INHERITANCE" (Eph. 1:14).**

When we understand this verse, it will give us added assurance that once

we are truly saved, we are saved forever.

The salvation that we have in by its very nature, a promise. We do not now experience all that it means to be saved. We can say that we were saved when we trusted in the Lord. But we can also say that we are being saved, that is, God's work of salvation in our hearts continues on, making us more mature, making more like the Savior. However, according to Scripture it is right for us to say that we will be saved, that is, some day we will experience the fulness of what it means to be saved. Our salvation will be complete when we are finally like the Lord.

We have the first. We are experiencing the second. We shall experience the third. Our salvation is a covenant, a contract (if you please), which God has made with us. The work is not yet complete in any of us, but God has given us His Holy Spirit as an unconditional guarantee that this work which He began, and which He is continuing, will finally be fulfilled in complete agreement with His promise. Hebrews 6 say that God gave a promise, and confirmed it with His oath, that by these two unchangeable things we might have the strongest possible confidence in God's promise to save those who trust in Christ. Here in Paul's prayer we see that our assurance is boosted by the Holy Spirit Who is God's seal guaranteeing that He will finish the work that He has begun in us.

To bring it down to today, we might say that our salvation is given to us in three installments: justification is the first, sanctification is the second, and glorification is the third and final installment. And God has given us His Holy Spirit as a promise that He will complete His agreement with us. It is "until the redemption of the purchased possession." We are God's purchased possession. He purchased us with the blood of His dear Son. And when our redemption is complete in our experience, we will be "unto the praise of His glory."

There is a statement in Acts 4:13 that I cannot fully explain, but it is certainly the greatest statement that can be made about any child of God. Let men read the verse to you:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; **and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.**

I don't know what it was which made Annas and Caiaphas and John and Alexander and all of the other relatives of the high priest "take knowledge of Peter and John, and think that "they had been with Jesus," but I would love for people to have that knowledge of me! Wouldn't you want

people to look at you, and know that you have been with the Lord Jesus Christ?

But let me tell you something that will be even more wonderful than that. When you and I are finally made like Christ, when we are made “unto the praise of God’s glory, this means that God Himself will look at us and see in us that which reminds us of His Son. Then we will know what it means that we shall be “holy and without blame before Him.” That is truly amazing grace!

Concl: Let me close with an illustration which I trust will help us to understand why the Apostle Paul was so happy about his salvation. It was so different from anything that he had known about God before he was saved.

Back in Genesis 15 Abraham had just been separated from Lot for the second time. We learn later that Lot went back to Sodom. But Abraham seems to have been discouraged because he had been in the land where God had promised to make him into a mighty nation, and he still did not have a son. Abraham understood that God’s promise to him was a promise that had to do not only with many of Abraham’s natural descendants, but also with Gentiles throughout the world. It was the promise of a Redeemer. For Abraham it also had to do with the land of promise.

We see in Gen. 15:8 that Abraham asked God a very reasonable question: “Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” Now his question meant that if God didn’t give him a son, how could he know that he would ever have the land, and how then could he be sure that the promised Redeemer would ever come.

At this point the Lord agreed to establish a covenant with Abraham. Or to state it another way, he agreed to making a contract with Abraham. How did they do it in those days? What was the nature of a seal in Abraham’s time to ratify an agreement?

Notice how the Lord responded to Abraham. I won’t read the whole passage, but let me read several verses:

9 And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.
10 And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the

birds divided he not (Gen. 15:9-10).

We would say with reference to a contract, or a covenant of promise, that God was having Abraham prepare the papers which were to be signed.

— Now look down to Gen. 15:17-18. And here we read these words:

17 And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down,
and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning
lamp that passed between those pieces.

18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with
Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from
the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

Let me explain what was happening. This was the way a contract was signed and sealed in Abraham's day. Two animals were killed, their bodies were cut in half and laid opposite each other so that there was room for men to walk between the two pieces. Then two birds were killed, and laid opposite each other on the two sides of the pathway. Then the people who were entering into the contract walked between the pieces. In this way they were declaring that they would each fulfill his part in the agreement.

— But what happened? We read in verse 17b, "Behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." What did this mean? Well, we know from Scripture that smoke and light are both symbols of the presence of God. So God passed between the pieces indicating that He would be faithful to the covenant He was making.

But what about Abraham? Where do we read that Abraham passed between those pieces? We don't read any such thing! Why? Because this covenant had to do with salvation, and Abraham had no part. Salvation is all a work of God, not dependent in any way upon Abraham -- or anyone else!

— In the prayer that we have been considering for four Sundays, we have found Paul praising the God for what He had done, and for what Christ had done, and for what the Holy Spirit had done, but where do we read about what Paul or the Ephesian believers had done? All we read about them is that they "trusted in Christ," that they had "believed," but they don't even get credit for that because he said that they trusted after they heard the word of truth, and Paul tells us that faith comes from hearing the Word of God and that it is a gift from God, a part of our salvation. It is God Who blesses us with "all spiritual blessings." It is God Who chose us for salvation. It is God Who predestined us to be His children. It is

God Who poured out His grace, His unmerited favor, upon us. It is God Who has redeemed us. It is God who has forgiven us. It is God Who has ordained that our salvation would be finished when we are to the praise of His glory. It is God who had sent the Holy Spirit to be the seal and earnest of our inheritance. And so to God belongs all of the praise and glory and worship forever and ever!

If Paul's salvation had depended in even a small way upon himself, he still could have praised the Lord for His part, but he could not have been certain of his salvation because somewhere along the line he was sure to fail to do what he was supposed to do. You see, we work from salvation, not to salvation. And we work, not to keep it, but out of love and gratitude to our great God and heavenly Father that He, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have done everything necessary for our salvation. And since our salvation is the same salvation which Paul and the Ephesians had, let us join in unceasing praise and worship for all of the blessing that we have in Christ.

A PRAYER FOR GREATER KNOWLEDGE

Ephesians 1:15-23

— **Intro:** Anyone who reads Ephesians 1 should notice that the word “glory” appears frequently throughout the chapter. In case you have not noticed this before, let me point them out to you. Notice the word “glory” in verses 6, 12, 14, 17, 18. (Read.) And so it is a word which seems to tie together Paul’s prayer in verses 3 through 14 with the prayer we are considering today in verses 15 through 23.

We can’t really understand Paul’s prayers in this chapter if we don’t understand the meaning of the word “glory” when it is applied to God. As we have seen, in verse 17 God is called “the Father of glory.” This, as one commentator has said, “distinguishes God as God” (Lenski, R. C. H., p. 392 in his commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, and Philipppians). The word “glory,” as the same commentator has said, “is the sum of all the divine attributes *in their manifestation*” (italics mine).

The Apostle John spoke of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We find his words, familiar words, in John 1:14:

— And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

This is a statement of the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, not all people recognized the Deity of Christ. Some only saw Him as a man. It is only by a special act of God Himself that people have their eyes opened, their spiritual eyes, to recognize the Son of God. This was brought out very clearly by our Lord when He quizzed His disciples concerning what people were saying about Him. But then He asked them, “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered Him, and then the Lord explained how it was that Peter had made this glorious discovery. Listen to the way Matthew described their conversation:

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 16: 16-17).

— God had revealed to Peter that our Lord was the Person He claimed to be, “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

So, if you ask how it is that some people recognize that Jesus is the Son of God, and others do not, the answer is that God has revealed this to some, but He has not revealed it to everyone.

Now this same thought enters into Paul's prayer here in the latter part of Ephesians 1. Look at verse 17. (Read.)

In verses 15 and 16 Paul had expressed his delight in their faith and in their love. He was convinced not only that their faith was real, but that it was growing. He was convinced of the same thing about their love for "all the saints"; it was real, and it was growing.

And because of this he was moved to do two things:

1) To give thanks to God for them. God had given them their faith, and God had given them their love for each other. And so He was to be praised.

But he did something else:

2) He prayed for them, and his intercession for them was just as constant as his thanksgiving.

Commentators and translators differ as to the meaning of the word "spirit" here in verse 17. Personally I believe that it should be capitalized as referring to the Holy Spirit. Paul was praying that God would enable the Ephesian believers to know Him, that is God, even better than they did. And we know from the Upper Room Discourse as well as other passages of Scripture, that revealing God to us in Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit. He reveals God by revealing Christ because in their Deity there is no difference between God the Father and God the Son. *Paul was praying that as wonderful as the progress the believers at Ephesus had made spiritually, things would continue to get better and better in their knowledge of God.*

The word that Paul used for "knowledge" in verse 17 is the Greek word ἐπίγνωσις. It means not only *knowledge* but a *full and true knowledge*. The knowledge of God that they had was good and true, but there is always more to be learned about God, learned in such a way that it will have a profound effect upon the way we live and what we strive to be. This was not just the knowledge of the attributes of God in a cold theological way, but a vital, personal relationship with God which would be life-changing in its effect upon the saints in Ephesus. It is the difference between what we sometimes refer to as *head knowledge* as compared with

get this on our own. But when the Holy Spirit teaches us, and begins to show us the glory of God, then our hearts are enlightened, our lives are changed, and we understand the Scriptures in a way that we could never know them without the help of the Holy Spirit. But it is always true that the more we know, the more we want to know, and the more we realize how much there is for us yet to learn. The Holy Spirit imparts to us this wisdom of God, and he does it by revealing to us what God has recorded for us in Scripture. Always be suspicious of things people want to tell you about God if they are coming to you from beyond the limits of the Word of God.

What a difference it makes when the Holy Spirit is teaching us! And we need to be consciously depending upon Him, not ourselves, for our understanding of God and His Word.

Now we are ready for the requests which Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers, and each of the three requests is identified with the little word “what.” Notice what they are:

- 1) “What is the hope of his calling.
- 2) “What [are] the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”
- 3) “What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.”

Before we look at these, let me give you a quotation from Alexander Maclaren as he began a series of three messages on this prayer. Here are his words:

A man’s prayers for others are a very fair thermometer of his own religious condition. What he asks for them will largely indicate what he thinks best for himself; and how he asks it will show the firmness of his own faith and the fervour of his own feeling. There is nothing colder than the intercession of a cold Christian; and, on the other hand, in no part of the fervid Apostle Paul’s writings do his words come more winged and fast, or his spirit glow with greater fervour of affection and holy desire than in his petitions for his friends (Vol. 10, Ephesians, p. 52).

I think we are safe in assuming that what Paul prayed for the Ephesians, he prayed for and desired for himself.

All right, let us look at his petitions.

I. “THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING” (Eph. 1:18m).

We have considered that word “hope” many times before in our study of the Word of God. It speaks of a purpose, a settled and guaranteed purpose. God had a specific purpose in saving us. Actually He had many purposes, but one stands at the head of them all. God’s purpose in saving us is that He might make us like His Son. It is not just that we would be forgiven of our sins so that we would not go to hell. It was not just that someday we might be in heaven. He sent His Son to die for our sins so that we would not go to hell, but would go to heaven. But He had a greater purpose than that in saving us. He saved us to make us like His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the main purpose of our salvation. This is why He called us to Himself through Christ. This is God’s effectual call in our lives. We have been chosen and called to be holy, and to be holy is to be like the Lord.

Now it is one thing for us to know this with our heads, but the effect is altogether different when this great truth reaches our hearts. When we really know in our hearts that we are called to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is going to make us very careful about the way we live each day. This work of making us like the Lord Jesus began the very moment we were saved, and it is a process of growth that will continue until we get to heaven. Once I realize what this means, it is going to make a difference in the place I give to the Lord in my life -- in the way I talk, in the way I think, in the things that I do, in the way I treat people, in the places I go, in what I look at on TV or anyplace else. If we really know why we have been saved, people are going to see a difference in the way we live. We are not going to follow the example of the people of the world; we are going to follow the example set by our blessed Lord when He was here on earth. And my oh my, how this will open our hearts to know God better than we ever have before. And we will be asking ourselves all of the time what will please the Lord as we make the decisions that we make all through every day.

Our President feels that he has really done something great because TV programs are now going to have to be rated. We are not going to pull bad programs off of the air, we are just going to identify those children should not be watching. Let me say this: That shouldn’t be a problem for those of us who know the Lord. We don’t need ratings to tell us what is wrong. And the tragic thing about these ratings is that it makes adults feel that it is OK for them to watch all of the filth they want to, but they can’t let their kids see it. Anybody with any sense at all should know that if a program is morally bad for children, it is morally bad for adults, too.

How we need to pray for each other that we will know “what is the hope of our calling,” really know it so that our living habits will be brought into conformity, not with the world, but with the Word.

Let each of us ask ourselves, Does my life manifest throughout the day that I have been called to be like Jesus Christ? If so, seek more than ever to be like the Lord. If not, make the changes that you need to make today, and start to live to please the Lord.

Let us go on to the second point:

II. “THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF HIS INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS” (Eph. 1:18b).

In verses 11 and 14 we learned about our inheritance in Christ; here Paul was praying that we would know about the glory of the Lord’s inheritance in us! What is the difference? Or is there any?

It seems that in these first two requests Paul was thinking about the same objective, but from two different points of view. In the first request which we have been considering, Paul was thinking about what our hope should mean to us, and how it should affect our lives. In this second request he was thinking about what the purpose of our salvation means to God Himself.

As many have pointed out, inheritance is basically a family word. We have our inheritance in God, our heavenly Father; but God also has an inheritance in us.

Note we have the word “glory” again in the statement, “the riches of the glory.” “Riches” speaks of an abundance, and so “the riches of the glory” must be an abundance of glory.

Probably the simplest way to state this subject of inheritance as it relates to us and as it relates to God is that God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are our inheritance (with all that that means), and amazingly, we are His inheritance! Isn’t that what this request means? God has called us to Himself. He has claimed each one of us for Himself. But we will not be what He wants us to be until we share His glory and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The term, “the riches of his glory,” suggests that we will fully display the glory of the Lord in that wonderful day when for the first time we see Him face to face. So when you and I think of heaven we need to think not only about what it is going to mean to us, but we need to

think about what it is going to mean to God! And the very thought of what our perfection will mean to God ought to make us even more careful about the way we live day by day.

— But now let us go on to the third and last request:

III. “WHAT IS THE EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TO US-WARD WHO BELIEVE (Eph. 1:19-23).

Now if we have been thinking carefully about the first two requests, and know anything about our own hearts, we will find ourselves asking, How could we ever expect to reach such a goal, the goal of becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ? We look at ourselves today and we see so much that is not like our Savior, what is our basis for believing that we will ever be like Him? The closing part of this prayer gives us our answers to these important questions.

— Paul was praying that the Ephesian believers would know how the goal is to be reached. The more we understand about the power of God, “the exceeding greatness” of that power, the more assured we will be that the goal can be ours. It would forever be out of our reach if we only had our own power to depend upon, or even if we could also depend upon the help we could give to each other. This goal is so great that it is foolish to think that we could ever reach it by our own power. We must count upon the power of God, and consciously depend upon God to make us what He wants us to be.

Does this mean that we just sit back and do nothing? Absolutely not! But it means that we do what we do in dependence upon God to enable us to be obedient to His Word. It is through obedience that we will become more and more like our Lord, and through the kind of a life which Paul has been describing in these verses that by God’s grace we are certain to reach the goal.

— In the remaining verses of the chapter Paul described “the exceeding greatness of God’s power to us-ward who believe.” And please notice that Paul was here indicating that the power of God is primarily reserved for those “who believe,” that is, for the saints, for those who are the true children of God. But this also means that God’s power is available to us as we simply trust the Lord to do for us what we would never be able to do for ourselves. And it is obvious that the more we understand about God’s power, the better we are going to know God Himself.

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(Read the concluding verses.) God’s power was shown in the resurrection of Christ, in the exaltation of Christ, in the dominion of Christ, in His place as Head of the Church (with all of the authority that includes).

Concl: “The exceeding greatness” of God’s power is seen throughout Scripture. It was seen at creation. It was seen in God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt. It was seen in His preservation of His people throughout the history of Israel. It was seen in the miracles of our Lord. And yet there could hardly be a greater illustration of the power of God in transforming a sinner into a saint, and transforming that saint into the very likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

— Let none of us ever doubt but that the power of God is sufficient to make us all that God intends for us to be. But let us pray this prayer for each other continually that we might really know these three great truths, know them in a life-transforming way, so that we may live to please God and to seek greater conformity to our blessed Savior.

—

STRENGTH FOR THE INNER MAN

Ephesians 3:13-19

Intro: Those of us who read our Bibles faithfully are continually seeing things in the Word of God which we have not seen before. Or it may be that we have noticed a certain statement, but it has not really been impressed upon us in the past like it has been in the present.

That has been my experience this week with verse 13 of Ephesians 3. In verse 13 Paul was stating why he had been moved in his heart to pray for the Ephesian believers the prayer which followed. And this is confirmed by verse 14. (Read both verses.)

Paul was concerned lest the Ephesian believers would “faint” because of the tribulations which *he* was going through *for them*. And he said at the end of verse 13 that *his tribulations were for their glory!* Notice: They were not just concerned for *him*, but they were concerned because *his sufferings were for them!*

We don't know exactly what Paul meant. Did he mean that he had been imprisoned (at least in part) because of his ministry in Ephesus? Probably not. It seems rather that Paul was saying that the disappointment and discouragement that they were experiencing because of Paul's imprisonment was being used in their lives to make them more like the Lord Jesus Christ. It was their glory, as it is of every believer, to become like their Savior. How could this be?

Well, think of the circumstances they were all facing. Lenski estimated in his commentary on Ephesians that Paul had been in prison for almost four years. During that time, except for what he was able to do in Rome when people came to him, or for what he was able to accomplish by prayer and by correspondence, *his work had come to a standstill!* This had been a great discouragement and a great disappointment to the people in the church at Ephesus. They probably had trouble trying to figure out why God had allowed this to happen to His servant who had been so very fruitful in his ministry. They probably also were struggling with the problem of unanswered prayer. The church had undoubtedly been praying for Paul, praying especially for his release, but there he was still in prison. Like so many things that the Lord does, *it probably did not make much sense to them*. And why, when the whole church was praying for Paul, did God not hear their prayers and answer them by setting Paul free? Surely his days of ministry were not over, and it would seem that he could have done far more outside of prison than he was able to do in

prison. And so Paul was concerned lest they would “faint.” He did not want them to lose heart. He did not want them to stop trusting the Lord. A fainting Christian is “good for nothing” (Lenski, p. 487). Discouragement can immobilize us.

So they were not discouraged because of their own sufferings, but because of his sufferings. But the point Paul was making is that the Lord was using his own circumstances to actually strengthen their faith, to draw them closer to the Lord when they realized that neither the importance of Paul’s ministry, nor even their prayers, were the determining factors in what God was doing. Their prayers had meant much to Paul, not at this point in obtaining his release, but in enabling Paul to see the hand of the Lord in his life, and to be at peace even though he faced some very difficult circumstances.

You see, we can be discouraged not only by what is happening to us, but by what is happening to those who are very dear to us. But what could Paul do to help the Ephesian believers through this trial which they were going through because of his imprisonment?

One, he could write to them -- which he did. And what a tragedy it would have been if we did not have his epistle to the Ephesians! So we can even say that Paul’s imprisonment was for us. Think of how we all have been blessed by this epistle. *However, writing to them was not the first thing that he did. He wrote to them to tell them over and over that he had been praying for them!*

Look at verses 14 and 15. (Read.)

Note Paul’s humility before God. He bowed his knees (meaning that he bent his knees). Kneeling can be a mere formality, but with the child of God it should express that attitude with which we approach the Lord. We probably should be just as afraid of thoughtlessness in prayer as we are of formality. You will remember from your reading of the lives of Moses and Aaron that time after time they fell on their faces before God. It showed their complete helplessness, and their utter dependence upon the Lord. Let us make sure when we pray that the posture of our bodies truly reflects the attitude of our hearts.

He bent his knees in humility before God, not as the God of heaven and earth (although God is that), nor as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (although He is that also). Paul came to God as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and to our Father because it is *of Christ* that “the

whole family in heaven and earth is named.”

— I have trouble believing that Paul would say here, as many commentators suggest, “of whom every family in heaven and earth is named.” He was speaking of *the family of God*. Cf. 1:5. The Father had more children than just the believers in Ephesus. Today has certainly has many more children than just those of us here who make up Trinity Bible Church. Wherever there are people who are trusting Jesus Christ as their Savior, you have members of the family of God. It is a big family. It is a glorious family. But let me say also that it is a very needy family. There is so much that we don’t understand. There is so much that we need to know. We can so quickly rise up in rebellion against our heavenly Father that this ought to scare everyone of us. And yet our Father is sufficient for every need that we have – the needs which we all have!

Possibly we have in this expression in verse 15 proof that this epistle was to be shared with other churches. Surely it was meant for every generation of the family of God from that day until this. And so this is a prayer that needs to be prayed for the Lord’s people everywhere in every generation! And it needs to be prayed because we need the Lord’s help in order to cope with the circumstances which we face in our lives every day.

— The prayer we considered in chapter 1, verses 17 to the end, was a prayer for knowledge. Here in chapter 3 Paul’s prayer has to do with the practical aspects of our relationship with the Lord. And so we come to the first request.

As in the prayer in chapter 1, the prayer here also has three main points. The first request begins in verse 16 and goes down to the middle of verse 17. The second request begins with the word “that” in the middle of verse 17 and goes down to the middle of verse 19. The third request begins in the middle over verse 19 and goes to the end of that same verse. The last two verses which I asked Mr. Wecks to read this morning are a doxology following the main prayer, and I hope to consider that separately.

Now I am not going to try to finish the whole prayer today, but I do want to get through the first request if possible, and then we will continue, the Lord willing, next Sunday.

— I. THE FIRST REQUEST (Eph. 3:16, 17a).

Will you notice that we have all three Persons of the Godhead mentioned

in verse 16 and the beginning of verse 17? Paul addressed his prayer to the Father, and his request had to do with the work of the Holy Spirit in preparation for what he said about Christ in verse 17.

Now please notice that Paul's first request had to do with "the inner man" of each believer in Ephesus.

Paul used this same expression in 2 Cor. 4:16. Let me read that verse to you along with verses 15 and 17 and 18:

15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, **yet the inward man is renewed day by day.**

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor 4:15-18).

The NT has different ways of describing a Christian. It speaks of "the old man," what we are by nature, and "the new man," what we are by grace. You will find these terms right here in Ephesians. See Eph. 4:22, 24.

But the NT also speaks, as we have seen, of "the inner man," or "the inward man" -- the same term. And in 2 Cor. 4:16 Paul spoke of "our outward man." The "outward man" is our physical body. It gets older each day, and one day it will die. But we are not only body, but we are soul and spirit. These make up our "inner man." This "inner man" is getting stronger and better every day. Our spiritual growth may not be that consistently good, but God is working in our hearts so that we are becoming every day more like He wants us to be. And it is in the inner man where we have our struggles. It was in "the inner man" that the Ephesians were battling with discouragement and very probably with their faith. And this is where they needed to be fortified. Whose work is that? It is the work of the Holy Spirit! But the Holy Spirit works in response to the Father. (Read verse 16 again.)

Notice that expression, "according to the riches of his glory."

We learned that God is "the Father of glory" because all "glory" comes

from Him, and “glory” is the sum total of all of the attributes of God. So this means that *out of all of the riches of the Deity of the Father* the Holy Spirit is going to strengthen us inwardly. This means that we are going to be strengthened with the very power of God Himself. We are weak, but — He is strong. In fact, He, as we all should know, is *omnipotent!* There is no need that any of us has which our heavenly Father is not able to meet. He doesn’t meet all of our needs at once, but gradually, day by day, we can expect that God will, by His Holy Spirit, strengthen us with might in our inner man.

Be sure not to miss what we might call a redundancy. What does it mean to be redundant in what we say? It means that we are repeating ourselves unnecessarily. If I say to you, “Come here right now, this very moment,” I am saying two things which mean the same thing. To come “right now” means to come “this very moment.” Now this repetition can be justified if I want to be emphatic. And so there might be times when a parent, or possibly a teacher, would be justified in saying, “Come here right now, this very moment.”

Well, Paul was repeating himself here in prayer. His first request was that the believers might be “strengthened with might.” You see, he could have said that you might “be strengthened ... by his Spirit in the inner — man” -- and we would get the point. Or he could have prayed that the Spirit would make the Ephesian believers *mighty* in the inner man. But Paul, we know, was guided by the Holy Spirit as he wrote this epistle, and so we have to say that his request was an intentional, and important, and absolutely correct repetition. He was not wasting words.

What did he mean? He was calling upon the Father to strengthen His people with dynamic power. The word translated “might” is the same word that our Lord used in Acts 1:8 when He spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is the word *δύναμις*. So this would lead us to understand that Paul was calling upon the Father to cause the Ephesians to understand that the Holy Spirit not only is the One Who strengthens us, *but He is Himself our strength, our power*. And we will only remain powerful as long as we continue to depend upon Him for our power to deal with all of the issues of life. Paul was not praying about a once-for-all work, but he was praying about a continuing relationship with the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit do this? He does it through prayer. In Eph. — 6:18 Paul taught the Ephesians (and it is meant for us, too) that we are to *pray in the Spirit*. That is, we are to depend upon the Holy Spirit to burden us to pray and to teach us to pray. The Holy Spirit strengthens us

through the Word. After all, wasn't He given to us to guide us into all the truth of the Word. And is there anything that the Holy Spirit delights more to do than to "take the things of Christ and show them to us"?

Everything that you and I know about the Word and about the Lord, the Holy Spirit has taught us. And all that He teaches us is designed by the Father to give us power so that we can live for the Lord, and so we can face the circumstances in our lives in ways that will glorify God.

Remember the Apostle Paul's prayer we considered in Col. 1:9-11, especially verse 11. We need the power of God given to us by the Holy Spirit to face the trials of life, the unanswered prayers, as well as the trials which those we love are enduring. The Holy Spirit enables us to deal with our disappointments and our discouragements. We have the promise in Gal. 5:16 that if we are walking in the Spirit, in fellowship with Him, trusting Him, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

But what is the purpose here for the strengthening of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit?

It is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."

Bishop Westcott in his commentary on Ephesians said that the word which Paul used for "dwell" (κατοικεῖν) means *a permanent dwelling* as compared with another very similar word he could of used which speaks of *a temporary sojourning* (παροῦκεῖν).

Several years ago Robert Munger, who was then the pastor of a large Presbyterian church in the Bay Area, wrote a tract called, *My Heart Christ's Home*. In it he was dealing with this truth of Christ dwelling in our hearts. And the point of his tract was to raise the question as to whether or not the Lord was really at home in our hearts. Spurgeon reminded his people on one occasion when he was preaching from this text that the heart is the best room we have. To have Christ dwelling in our hearts means that we love Him, we are enjoying daily, personal fellowship with Him. It means that we are more concerned about pleasing Him than we are anything else, and so we diligently make it our business to be just as obedient to the Word as we possibly can be. You see, when we have this kind of a relationship with the Lord Jesus, it makes us look differently at all of our troubles. We still have the frailty of the flesh with us, but we have a source of strength in the Holy Spirit and in the Lord Jesus Christ which makes life altogether different. Remember we are not going to be perfect until we get to heaven, but we must be pressing on toward that goal.

CF. JOHN 14: 23 (NKJV) AND REV. 3: 20.

Concl: Paul knew what the answer was to the discouragement and disappointment and lack of faith which the Ephesian believers were experiencing in their anxiety over him. Paul wanted them to see that his circumstances were not to be the cause of their discouragement, but to be the reason for their great joy. Neither God the Father, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the Lord Jesus would leave the Apostle alone without all of the daily grace and strength he would need to be at peace and even to be able to rejoice in the Lord that the Lord's purposes were being fulfilled, his own needs were being met, and even the Ephesians as they looked on Paul's circumstances from afar, would be experiencing the transforming work of God in their hearts as they were able to rest in the love of God and in the wisdom of God.

The Lord willing, we will finish the prayer next week, but let me ask you as I close (and I ask myself as well), Is your heart, and is my heart, Christ's home? Or have our troubles so consumed our attention this week that we have actually forgotten the Lord? Remember, this is a problem which we can't correct. It is corrected by prayer and by the way the Lord blesses us in the means of grace He has given us, reading the Word, obeying the Word, meditating on Christ, enjoying fellowship with the Lord's people, so that Christ becomes a greater reality in our lives and we truly make Him at home in our hearts.

Zacchaeus took the Lord home with him, and remember what happened. The two disciples who lived in Emmaus took the Lord to their home, and think of what happened there. May this prayer be the means of bringing all of us into greater fellowship with our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.