

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF PAUL

Ephesians 1:15-17

Intro: I think that most of you will remember that, in the early days of the Church, when the work in Jerusalem had grown to the place that the apostles were not able to keep up with everything that needed to be done, the apostles called upon “the multitude of the disciples” to appoint seven men with the proper spiritual qualifications to join with them in caring for the material needs of the people, especially the widows. As a result seven deacons chosen so that the apostles could give themselves “continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). The Apostle Paul was not even a Christian at that time, but, from we read in his epistles, he subscribed completely to what the original apostles felt was their special calling from the Lord: *to give themselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word*. You will note that it was not just one or the other, but to both! And it is apparent that in their minds, prayer needed to precede the ministry of the Word. We all should know that prayer should precede the reading of the Word, and the study of the Word, and that prayer should always follow our reading and our study of the Word.

Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus illustrates the close relationship there must always be between prayer and the ministry of the Word. For example, verse 2 of chapter 1 is a prayer. Then the doctrine which Paul was teaching in verses 3 through 15 (which we concluded last Sunday) is introduced with the words, “Blessed be the God and Father . . .” which indicates that all that Paul wrote from verse 3 down to verse 15 was written as praise to God! Praising God, or worship, is a very important form of prayer.

Then having finished verse 15, which from verse 3 on to verse 15, teaching in the form of a prayer, we come to our text which I have chosen for this morning, and this whole section from verse 15 is a prayer. Paul believed that whether you are reading what he wrote, or could have actually heard him say these things, Paul needed the help of God in presenting the truth and they needed the help of God in understanding the truth. So how was he to get that help? It was by prayer.

I don’t know why it is, and I don’t want to be guilty of describing our generation of Christians, but it seems to me that our generation is weak on both of these points. We hear all of the time about people, the Lord’s

people, are looking for a church where the Word of God is being taught near where they live, but they can't find one. Prayer meetings in many otherwise evangelical churches are almost non-existent. I can remember when the midweek prayer meeting was a well attended services of the week. Life has become terribly busy for all of us, and we have so many gadgets that claim our attention, that it is often those times which we have planned to give to prayer, have been crowded out by other things that have to be done, but it is prayer that suffers the greatest neglect. All of us need to take stock of our lives. What place does prayer have in your life, and in my life? I am not talking at you this morning; I want to be talking with you. Do we know what it is to pray without ceasing? Are we interested in knowing what it means to pray without ceasing? "Pray without ceasing" is not just a suggestion for us to consider; it is a command. And if prayer does not have a major place in our lives, it shows that we don't realize how dependent we are upon the Lord.

Before we get into this wonderful prayer of the Apostle Paul here in Ephesians 1, I want us to see from what Paul wrote in verses 15, 16, and 17 what they tell us, at least in part, about the place that Paul gave to prayer in his life and ministry. I am sure that we are not going to see the Church of Jesus Christ as a mighty force in these days in which we live until we give prayer the place that it has always held in times when the blessing of God was very obvious because people spent much time in fellowship with God, calling upon Him to make us what He wants us to be that our lives might impress people, not with how great we are, but with how great a God we have.

Well, let's begin by looking, first, this morning, at verse 15 of Ephesians 1. It is:

I. A VERSE CONNECTING WHAT PAUL HAD WRITTEN WITH WHAT HE WAS ABOUT TO WRITE (Eph. 1:15).

The first word of verse 15 in the KJV is "Wherefore." A literal translation of the Greek would be, *on account of this*. The NASB translates it, "For this reason." It is easy to read any of these translations without stopping to think what it means. Paul was indicating here that it was because he was assured that the Lord had worked in many of their hearts as he had described in verses 3-15, that he was now going to tell them how he had been praying for them. Paul's words in verse 3 through 14 had been applied to the Ephesian saints. He was not saying what God has

planned to do, but what He had already done in their hearts. Thus, you have the frequent use of words like “us” and “we” and “ye.” (Read a few verses to show what I mean.)

Paul was not writing to those in Ephesus who were not Christians, but to those who had faith in the Lord Jesus, those who were really trusting in the Lord Jesus for their salvation. And how was their faith manifested? By their “love unto all the saints.” Remember that this is how he had addressed them in the first verse of this epistle. (Read 1:1.) There is a special bond of fellowship, a special relationship that exists among all of the people of God. Even when we go to Japan (or any other country) and meet with Christians there, although we may not be able to carry on a conversation with them, we know there is a love which binds our hearts together. In our Tuesday Class where we have been studying the thirteenth chapter of John’s Gospel, we came to those two wonderful verses, 34 and 35 where it is record that the Lord said to His eleven disciples after Judas had left them, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another . . .” In 1 John 3:14 we have that verse I have reminded you of before: “We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren . . .”

If you and I don’t love the people of God, it is meaningless for us to claim that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. So Paul was assured that those Ephesian Christians were trusting in Christ for their salvation because of the love they had for each other.

So the Apostle Paul was writing to believers, those who were trusting in Christ for their salvation, and who therefore we possessors of those spiritual blessings that Paul had mentioned in verses 3 through 14. If you don’t love the Lord’s people, then you don’t believe in the Lord Jesus, and if you don’t believe in the Lord Jesus, then you don’t have any of the spiritual blessings that Paul mentioned in the first part of this chapter.

Again let me urge you to make sure that your faith is in Jesus Christ for your salvation. There is no more important matter that any of us will ever have to face. Life is so uncertain. We never know what might happen in any day. Solomon wrote as one of his proverbs, “Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth (Prov. 27:1). Today is the day of salvation. We may never have a tomorrow. We don’t know whether we will or not, do we?”

But Paul was writing to those who had heard God's call, and who had been enabled by the grace of God to respond in faith to His call.

But now let us move on to verse 16. What had the Apostle Paul been doing for them?

II. TWO THINGS PAUL HAD DONE FOR THEM, AND CONTINUED TO DO FOR THEM (Eph. 1:16).

First, from the time he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and the love that they had for each other, he had not ceased to give thanks for them. That was the first point. The second was this: He had not ceased to pray for them. Let's look at this verse carefully.

Have you ever noticed in reading Paul's epistles that he never thanked the people of God for their salvation? He gave thanks *for* them, but he did not give thanks *to* them. To whom did he give thanks? Obviously he gave thanks to God! Why? Well, the first verses of this chapter have told us why. It is because God had everything to do with our salvation; and we had nothing to do with it. But you may respond to me by saying, "Yes, but I did something for my salvation. I received it. I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ." But then I ask you, "Where did your faith come?" Look ahead into Ephesians chapter 2, and let your eyes run down to verses 8 and 9. Those verses tell us that salvation is "the gift of God" – all of it from start to finish. And this includes your faith. Paul wrote in Romans 10:17 that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Hebrews 12:2 tells us that we are to be "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." God chose us. Then He called us. And then He drew us. And He gave us life. And then He gave us the faith to believe in Christ. And after the Lord saved us He has been keeping us day by day in spite of the many times we have failed Him, and those times also when we have rebelled against His will. Salvation is not something where we do part and the Lord does the rest. No! The Lord Jesus does it all. It comes free to us, but it cost God the death of His only begotten Son. So we give thanks to God, and to Him we give thanks for saving each one of us.

Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain;
He washed it white as snow.

But then the Apostle Paul said, "Making mention of you in my prayers." But you might say, "Why would the Apostle Paul pray for believers in Christ who seemed to be getting along so well?" Paul even said that he

was *continuously* remembering them in his prayers.

Well, he prayed for the saints because that is what God wanted him to do. And then, he prayed for the saints because they needed it. We all sin against the Lord. We all fail the Lord more often than we like to think. Regardless of how well we may be doing, we can always do better. And then we all have trials and temptations to overcome. And we have a very real enemy in the Devil who is always seeking to draw us back into sin. Turn to Ephesians 6:18 which applies to all of us, and then at the beginning of verse 19 Paul wrote, “and for me,” that is, he wanted their prayers also.

Paul probably did not mention all of them by name every day, but he would mention special needs that he knew about and pray generally for all of them. Paul did not believe that his work including just teaching. Nor to him was it not enough to write letters telling them the truth of God’s Word and urging them to trust the Lord. He believed that he needed to prepare the way by prayer, to pray as he talked or wrote, and then he wanted to follow up his teaching and writing with prayer.

But we must move on to verse 17. Here the Apostle Paul stated:

III. WHY PRAYER IS SO NECESSARY.

This also relates back to the first part of our chapter. We all know, or should know that the Bible is a revelation from God. It is also a revelation of God. God reveals what cannot be known in any other way. The Bible is a book that is different from any other book that has been written. The Lord so directed the writers of the Bible by His Holy Spirit so that they were led as to the very words that they were to record. We do not believe in *thought* inspiration, that God gave them the idea and let them express themselves in their own way and words. We believe in *verbal* inspiration, so although there are about forty writers of the books of Scripture, yet there is but one Author, the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are justified in speaking of the Bible as the *Word of God, the living God.*

But what God has revealed in Scripture must be made known, taught to each of us by the Author, the Holy Spirit. And this is what the Apostle Paul was referring to here in verse 17 that we all have to be “taught of God” (John 6:45; 1 Thess. 4:9). Paul in 1 Corinthians 2 dealt with this very important subject. (Turn to it if time permits; if not, mention especi-

ally 1 Cor. 2:9, 10.) What has been revealed in the Bible must be taught personally to each one of us by the Holy Spirit.

The word “spirit” here does not have the definite article “the” in front of it so expositors differ as to whether or not the Apostle Paul here was referring to the Holy Spirit. But Bishop Moule in his commentary on Ephesians says that “in the case of great and well-known word, such as God, Lord, the article (the) is often omitted as unneeded for definition” (p. 48. footnote 2). So he took this as a reference to the Holy Spirit, and I do too.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of revelation. He is the Author of all revealed truth. “Wisdom” is the wisdom of God as contrasted with human wisdom, The word knowledge is the Greek word for *a full knowledge*. So Paul was teaching here the necessity that we all be taught by the Spirit of God, and that this knowledge is a growing knowledge as we grow in the Lord. We never learn it all, but we keep learning, not only the doctrines of Scripture, but the personal application of those doctrines as well. Thus the Holy Spirit in this case of the Epistle to the Ephesians gives us the understanding of the wisdom of God given by revelation from God, and He also is the One Who uses the Word to transform our lives. How necessary, and how wonderful it is to be growing in our knowledge of God, and some day we will know Him as we are known.

Concl: Thus the Apostle Paul teaches us that he has given us the truth about our salvation, but it is only by the Holy Spirit that we can understand the revealed truth of the Word, and that this is usually given in answer to prayer.

So as we read our Bibles, we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will open our hearts to the Word. And as we pray for others, either individuals or whole churches like the church of Ephesus, pray that the Holy Spirit will open the hearts of the Lord’s people to the truth that they are hearing, and that the Word will be the mighty force that it is in making His people more like the Lord Jesus which is the grand objective that God has in saving us.

If you are here without Christ, ask the Lord to open the eyes of your heart so that you will through the truth of God’s Word be brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ Who died to save sinners from their sins.