

Sermon 31, Praying to the Father, Ephesians 3:14-15

Proposition: Paul's vision of the growing church led him to pray, and your knowledge that the church is growing ought to lead you to do the same!

- I. Pray Because the Church Is Growing, vv. 1, 14a
- II. Pray Because God is Your Father, vv. 14-15
 - A. He Made You a Family Member, v. 15a
 - B. He Named the Church "The Father's Family," v. 15b
- III. Pray Because Obedience is impossible without prayer, 3:14-19, 6:18-19

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I am going to preach this morning a sermon that might sound very similar to my sermon before Christmas. If you recall, at that time I exhorted you from chapter 1 to give prayers to your fellow saints for Christmas. Well, once again, the main point of this sermon is that you ought to pray to the Father. Of course, you ought to pray for particular things, but the most important thing is simply to pray, simply to spend time talking to God and telling Him what's on your heart even as you learn to care about what's on His heart. Indeed, rather than focusing on the content of the prayer, the two verses we'll look at this evening focus on the reasons for prayer. Three major reasons are listed here: We should pray because the church is growing, because it is God's family, and because obedience is impossible without prayer. Paul's vision of the growing church led him to pray, and your knowledge that the church is growing ought to lead you to do the same!

I. Pray Because the Church Is Growing, vv. 1, 14a

Our text begins with the words "for this reason." For what reason? For the reason that was mentioned back in v. 1. Indeed, Paul is resuming the thought he had when he interrupted himself to talk about the greatness of his ministry. What is the reason? The reason is that the church is growing in Christ. It is growing more like Him, and it is growing together into a greater unity and deeper connection. The fact that the church is growing led Paul to his knees to ask God to help His people understand more of His love in Christ.

Does the growth of the church motivate you to pray for more growth? Do you have this kind of relationship with God? Because this is the kind of relationship Paul had. When he saw God at work building the church, his instinctive response was to kneel down and ask God for further growth in love, faith, and knowledge. Why? Because he knew how much God loves to give and how much He wants to see His children come to understand His love!

If you get a box of Harry and David pears at Christmastime from a relative you hardly ever see, then you do not think "Hey, I bet this relative wants to give me some cheese to go with

these pears!” You think, “Well, that was nice and we probably won’t have anything to do with each other until next Christmas.”

But think of a relative you see every week, one whom you deeply love and with whom you’re very close. Call him your dad. And let’s say that your dad has splurged and bought you a new house for Christmas. Maybe it’s a cabin at your favorite lake or on your favorite mountain. Maybe it’s beautiful mansion in town, close to where you work and worship.

Now, what are you going to do? Are you going to say, “Thanks, Dad. This is an awesome gift. I’m going to go spend some time in this house, and I’ll get back to you in six months”? No! What is the only appropriate thing to do in these circumstances? It’s to say, “Dad, come tour the house with me! Show me every room. Have dinner with me in the dining room. Watch the BBC’s *Planet Earth II* with me in the home theater! Tinker in the garage with me, and marvel at the luxurious heated tile floors!”

In other words, because your father gave you this gift, what would you instantly do? You would ask for the further gift of teaching you to enjoy it with him. You would want him to introduce you to all the wonders of his gift, and to enjoy your enjoyment of them. You would want him to help you appreciate his gift.

Brothers and sisters, that is what’s going on in this passage. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the Heavenly Places in Christ Jesus. And as soon as he finishes recounting the scope and size of those blessings, Paul falls to his knees and asks our Heavenly Father to give the further gift of teaching us to understand and experience this gift in its fullness. He wants us to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. He wants us taste the mind-bending dimensions that measure the sweetness of the love we have in Jesus. He wants us to be strong enough to receive the gift that the Father has already given us. And so he betakes himself to prayer.

If you don’t pray, brothers and sisters, then I can only conclude that you do not understand the magnificence of what God is doing in the church. If you think that you can experience and enjoy this reality without your Father at your side, strengthening you with His Spirit to grasp the ungraspable love of Christ, then you don’t know what kind of reality you’re talking about. It’s rather like thinking you can ride one of those loop-de-loop roller coasters without buckling in. “Oh, my arms are very strong and I’m sure I can hold on when I go around those curves and experience six times the force of gravity.” Sure you can! No — you’ll fly off and die. Thinking that you can experience the love of Christ without the Father’s help is like standing on the beach watching a 15-foot wave roll in and thinking, “I’m strong. I’ll just stand here and let this wash around me and I’ll still be standing here when it recedes.” Not.

Brothers and sisters, the love of Christ is like that roller coaster, is like that wave. It is far more intense than you can imagine. You cannot know it without being strengthened for it by the Holy Spirit of God. And so, when you see the blessing of God that manifests itself in church growth, fall to your knees and pray. Ask God to strengthen you and all the saints for such blessings. Ask Him to prepare you to receive His mighty gifts.

II. Pray to the Father, vv. 14-15

Paul goes on to tell us that he prayed to the Father. As we have noted before, it is perfectly appropriate to pray to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. But in general, most prayers are addressed to the Father, because He is the ultimate source of everything we have and because it is from Him that the Son and the Spirit receive everything they give to us. In this chapter, Paul highlights the Father's power.

A. He Made You a Family Member, v. 15a

He is the Father from whom the whole family on Heaven and Earth is named. Now, to name something is to have power over it. God named Adam, and Adam named Eve and all of the animals. To this day, human beings give names to animals, but animals do not give names to us! So God has the power to name — to name “every family,” as some translations have it, but also to name “the whole family.” The Greek is truly ambiguous here, and I think that it means “the whole family.” Paul has been talking about the unity of the church. He has already described it as one giant family, the “household of God.” And so I believe that he continues that idea here. God has made you a member of this family, the group of people that we call the church. Do you see the church as one big family? Do you believe that you have family in China, in deepest Africa, in Australia and South America and wherever you can go in this world? You do! And if you travel and visit other churches as you go, you will quickly find out how true this statement is. My sister, for instance, visited a little Anglican church in Australia. There were only six people there for worship, but they poured love on my sister and her family. God has made you a family member. And so that's why you should pray to Him. You are not a stranger or an alien any more. None of us calls random numbers out of the phone book and then tries to talk to those stranger for an hour. But all of us whose parents are still living take the time to call them and talk. We talk to our family members! And that is one huge motive for our prayers. We want to learn to talk to God because He has made us part of His family.

Notice that this family is not all in one place. Part is on earth, but part is already in Heaven. That is true of our earthly families as well. But though we are separated by the reality of death, we are nonetheless one family still. Just as I can say truly that I have ten siblings, though one of those ten is in Heaven, so we can say truly that in the family of God we have many siblings, millions on earth and millions more already rejoicing in the presence of Jesus. This is a theme that is frequently neglected in Reformed circles, perhaps, but it is a valuable one! The fact that our loved ones have departed and gone to be with Christ is not a reason to pray to them; we have no reason to believe that they can hear us. But though we cannot communicate with them for a time, they are still family, and we ought to regard them as such.

B. He Named the Church “The Father's Family,” v. 15b

So what name did the Father give to this one family? We could paraphrase and say that He named it “the Father's family,” as William Hendriksen does in his commentary. We could say that He called it the church, the Family of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. We could say that is also known as the seed of the woman and as the people of God.

Whatever title we use, the fact remains that we are God's people, His beloved ones, His family, His sons and daughters, the apple of His eye and the people of His delight. We bear His Son's name in that we are called "Christians" and His name in that we are called "God's people."

Is this how you think of the church? Do you recognize that we bear God's name, and that how we live will necessarily either hallow or dishonor that name? If you realize that you are part of the family of God that bears the patronymic, then you will want to pray! You will realize that you need to be in touch with your namesake, with the head of your family. You will delight to tour this grand edifice He is building for Himself and therefore for you in His company, delighting in His delight even as He delights in yours.

III. Pray Because Obedience is impossible without prayer, 3:14-19, 6:18-19

But brothers and sisters, we need to pray for one another not only because we are part of the one family of God and because we need the strength to experience everything God has given us, but also because we cannot obey God without prayer.

Did you notice the frame that Paul has built around chs. 4-6, the chapters that explain the duties of those who have received every spiritual blessing? It is a frame of prayer! Both at the beginning of the section and at the end of it, Paul mentions prayer. It is a well-known literary technique called an "envelope" because it encloses whatever is inside. The envelope, then, carries the contents of all Paul's moral exhortations. It is his way of saying that the Christian life begins and ends with prayer, and that you can never even begin to keep any of God's commands without praying.

Is sin winning in your life? Then pray harder. Are you walking in unity, purity, harmony, and victory as much as you want to? Pray. Pray, so that you can obey. Pray, so that you know God's gifts to you. Pray, so that you can fully participate in the Father's family. We need more prayer in this church! It is the only way to know our Father and to receive His fullness. Amen. Let's pray.