

A Prayer for the Ephesians – Part 3

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul prays that the Ephesians will grow in the knowledge of God in every way
2. aim – to cause us to seek to know God, to understand him and to be known by him in every way
3. passage – Ephesians 1:15-23

b. outline

1. The Reason for the Prayer (Ephesians 1:15-16a)
2. The Reality of the Prayer (Ephesians 1:16b-18a)
3. The Results of the Prayer (Ephesians 1:18b-23)

c. opening

1. a **question** at the heart of this passage
 - a. what would the *Apostle Paul* pray for GFBC (and its people)?
 1. **principle: never let the good crowd out the best!**
 2. **IOW:** given many things are “good” for the church, what would be the “best” request for her?
 3. Paul will tell us in **Ephesians 1:15-23** what is the best thing God could grant to any church
2. the **structure** at the heart of this passage
 - a. the reason why Paul prays
 1. the request that Paul will make for the church flows out of his absolute assurance and his attitude of gratitude – not by *pragmatic* need, but by *central truth* (i.e. the divine decree)
 - b. the substance (or reality) of what Paul prays – a way of living and understanding built on knowing
 1. that the church would grow in a “*knowledge*” of God (i.e. who he is and what he has done)
 2. that the church would apply that knowledge in “*wisdom*” (i.e. how to live in that light)
 3. that the church would glean from that knowledge “*revelation*” (i.e. why God acts as he does)
 - c. (**now**) the results of what Paul prays (a final element of the structure; e.g. a “roof” over the building)
 1. **fact #1:** the knowledge of theology and doctrine is (in the abstract) “passive” = it is something understood in an “**external**” (or a taking-in or absorbing) sort of way
 - a. which is entirely contrary to the nature of God – he does not “learn” because knowledge to him is not passive; he “knows” which becomes the nature of existence itself
 - b. for humans, we must have “passive” knowledge because we are finite and creaturely
 - c. e.g. Adam and Eve understood “evil” in a passive sense prior to the Fall
 2. **fact #2:** the knowledge of theology and doctrine is also (in the real-world) “active” = it is something to be understood in an “**internal**” (or **experiential**) sort of way
 - a. **IOW:** theology must move from being something just “known” to being something that is *experienced* – something that pervades our lives because we have experienced it ourselves
 3. so, here, Paul prays not just for the Ephesians to *know* theology, but to be **enveloped by it** – to “exist” *in and through* and *surrounded by* the very things that we know to be true
 4. Paul brings (as the climax of his prayer) three (3) specific *experiential* traits that he wishes to see in the Ephesians: their hope, the riches of their inheritance, and the power of God
 - a. **read Eph. 1:18b-19a**, highlighting “*that*” and “*what is [are]*”
 - b. **note:** Paul skims over the first two, and spends the rest of the sentence on the third

III. The Results of the Prayer (Ephesians 1:18b-23)

Content

a. the hope to which we are called (v. 18b)

1. “*hope*” = a concrete assurance in the face of (future) certainty
 - a. a word that has been *overused* to the point of becoming unrecognizable
 1. e.g. “Christian” – used as a political term (i.e. the West), a general term applying to anyone who accepts certain *creedal* truths (i.e. Catholics, E Orthodoxy, mainline Protestants), or a title applied to someone connected to “Christianity” by virtue of a *ritual* (with no discernible change)
 - b. vernacular = an optimism in the face of uncertainty; wishful thinking
 1. true, there are circumstances in life that are such, but this is *not* the biblical idea of the word

- c. biblical = an assurance in the face of certainty; an absolute confidence in what is already established; an anticipation accompanied by a sense of abiding pleasure
1. **x53** in N.T. – **IMO**: always in the sense of confidence in the concrete (**Rom. 4:18; 8:24-25; Gal. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:8**)

"In hope [Abraham] believed against hope [the odds], that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, 'So shall your offspring be.' ... For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience ... For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness ... But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."
- d. hope is an **experiential** form of theology – it *permeates* every aspect of the life of the believer – it is to embrace something as so *true* that it affects every aspect of one's life
1. **note**: only a Reformed soteriology can produce genuine assurance of the future (**see below**)
2. "to which he has called you" = the means by which this hope is secured in us
- "Those whom God hath predestinated unto life, he is pleased in his appointed, and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; 1) enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; 2) taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; 3) renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and 4) effectually drawing them to Jesus ..." (1689, 10:1)
- a. call = an act of God, through the proclamation and power of the gospel, in which he *summons* specific people to himself in such a way that they are converted and respond in faith
 1. a Trinitarian work: the Father calls people *through* the Spirit *to* faith in Jesus Christ
 2. a real work: the call comes *through the proclamation* of the gospel (**i.e.** via means)
 3. a specific work: a specific call to specific people at a specific time (**i.e.** not a general invitation)
 4. an effective work: a call that *must* and *will* produce the results that God demands (**i.e.** effectual)
 - b. **the calling of God is central to the concept of "hope" – we have a confident assurance because the result has already been established by God, and our inclusion in it is entirely on the basis of what he has done**
3. **Paul prays for the church that every believer would "know" that kind of assurance – that it would permeate every aspect of both the individual and corporate life of believers**
- a. **question**: how does your calling to Christ affect your life in the present – how many **sacrifices** are you willing to make *now* knowing that you belong *utterly* to Christ?
- b. the riches of our inheritance (v. 18c)**
1. "glorious inheritance" = the value of what God has in store for his saints
 - a. **note**: Paul has already mentioned this "inheritance" in **vv. 11 and 14**
 1. **v. 11** – being included in Christ means that we are included in all that is given to him
 2. **v. 14** – being sealed by the Spirit means that we are guaranteed to be found in him
 - b. **note**: we have already speculated as to what this inheritance is composed of:
 1. a resurrected and glorified nature as fully human in accordance with God's original design
 2. a renewed and glorified creation as the perfect "playground of the elect"
 3. a perfected and glorified access to the presence of our Creator in an intimate relationship
 2. "riches of ..." = a *practical* response to the value of what God has in store
 - a. "riches" = great abundance; wealth; valuable bestowment
 1. but, in this context: how we see it, how we respond to this inheritance, how it affects us
 2. **i.e.** "riches" is not how valuable the inheritance is, but how valuable we see it
 - b. **our inheritance is not just something "waiting" for us (although it has elements of that); it is something that has present-day effect – followers of Christ are (literally) altered by this inheritance; it is so "real" in the present that their lives are altered by knowing it's there**
 1. or, we should understand it in an **experiential** way
 2. **e.g.** the difference between the view of "going to heaven when you die" vs. the view that sees us *already* in our "eternal life" – living as though we belong to another kingdom (**John 18:36**)

"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."
3. **Paul prays for the church that every believer would "know" that kind of future glory – that it would permeate every aspect of both the individual and corporate life of believers**
- a. **question**: how does your future inheritance affect your life in the present – how many **risks** are you willing to take *now* knowing that your *future* is utterly secure?
- c. the power of God toward us (vv. 19-23)**
1. **note**: Paul spends the bulk of his time on this aspect of experiential theology (**5 verses**)
 - a. because he knows that experiencing our calling and our inheritance *in the present* is all based on the power of God to act in and through us
 2. **note**: Paul spends the bulk of his time on this aspect outlining the power of God *in Christ* (**4/5 verses**)
 - a. because he knows that the fullest demonstration of God's power is in the person, position, and work of Jesus Christ, as the culmination of his redemptive plans in time and space

3. “power” = the outworking of God’s purposes in and through his elect
 - a. “power” = ability; might; miraculous; strength; lit. one who rules with supernatural ability
 1. this word is the most **experiential** amongst the three:
 - a. God exercises power to create, to elect, to redeem (see below), to regenerate, to effectually call, to persevere the elect in faith, to provide common grace, to sanctify, to resurrect, etc.
 - b. we experience the power of God in numerous ways as members of the elect – in fact, our entire salvation is the power of God from beginning to end (“*immeasurable greatness*”)
 - b. **the power of God is constantly being exercised in and around us; it is something that has real present-day effect – followers of Christ are regularly subsumed under the power of God, not only for their day-to-day lives, but for the ultimate goals of God in us**
 1. or, we should be looking to **experience** the power of God in everything
4. **Paul prays for the church that every believer would “know” the true power of God – that it would permeate every aspect of both the individual and corporate life of believers**
 - a. **question:** how does the power of God affect your life in the present – how much **effort** are you willing to expend on his goals knowing that it is his power undergirding your success?
 - b. and what is the *center* of this power? **(stay tuned)**