

The Way to Pray

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We continue our look at Ephesians and grasping the implications of salvation, the greatness of God's work on our behalf and seeing the way that that moves and works in our heart. Last time, we finished Ephesians 13 and 14 out of chapter 1 and really finished a long series of messages on verses 3-14 which is an extended praise from Paul to God for his work in salvation. God has chosen us. God has adopted us into his family. God has redeemed us in the Lord Jesus Christ. God is working all things that ever happened to accomplish his will and his has included us in his will. We will be there in victory with Christ at his triumph on the final day. Going further, God has sealed us in the Holy Spirit and given us his guarantee, his pledge that he will keep us until the final day. Not only is salvation great, it can never be lost because God chose us before the beginning of time in order to save us and keep us through time to the accomplishment of the end of time and we will be with him throughout all the ages of eternity rejoicing and praising Christ forever and ever amen. Those are great truths. No wonder it took us a few weeks to get through them. We are greatly blessed in Christ. Those of us who are saved have had such a great, unspeakable, immeasurable gift laid upon us that it will take us all of eternity to watch it unfold and praise and thank God for what he has done.

Now, what does that mean in terms of what does that do for us now? How do we respond to that? Well, in some ways, the rest of the book of Ephesians explains that but for today, I just want this one thought to echo in your mind: the greatness of what we have seen. The greatness of what we have in Christ should make us so grateful, so thankful, so full of gratitude in our hearts for our conversion that we identify ourselves and our priorities with the purposes of God and we pray accordingly. In other words, we're not supposed to simply view this great salvation in an abstract mental way and appreciate the theology of it. Oh, we do that and the greatness of the theology is what informs the depth and the breadth of our worship, don't misunderstand. But what I want you to see is that these truths that God has chosen us, adopted us, redeemed us and sealed us with his Holy Spirit, has a force in our hearts, has a force in our affections, has a defining impact on our priorities that all of life is different as a result. There is a reason why as you continue to hear these kinds of things week after week, that the things of earth seem less important to you and heaven seems more greatly wonderful than it did before. That's what's supposed to be happening. There should be a moving of the inertia of your heart, the center of

gravity in your heart where your affections are identified with the purposes of God in such a great way that it just changes the way that you think and what you care about.

You see, these things are magnificent. These things are no simply a lesson on how you can have a better marriage or how you could get along better at work or have better friends and all of that. That stuff is fine as far as it goes but in comparison to the greatness of salvation, that man-centered concepts, those man-centered concerns, that man-centered teaching, really pales in comparison to the greatness of what God has done. So our hearts are just drawn to this and this is what we care about and what we identify with and it changes us. It changes what we care about. It changes what we are grateful for. It changes what we love to see. And it changes the way that we view people and the way that we pray for them. That's what we're going to see in our passage this morning. Ephesians 1:15-19. Follow along as I read this out of the NASB version.

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might. 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.

We'll stop there for this morning. How does true salvation, how does an understanding of conversion, how does a knowledge of what God has done in our lives affect the way that we pray? That's really what we want to see today and we're going to see two primary aspects of a healthy prayer life in response to the sovereignty of God in salvation. What we want to see is more than just themes upon which we pray, what I want you to see is the force of salvation in the way that it shapes the Christian heart. That's what we need to see today because it changes everything. It changes the way that we look at all of life.

So first of all, what I want you to see from this prayer of the Apostle Paul is that we, first of all, pray with sincere gratitude. We pray with sincere gratitude that flows from – this is really important – we pray with sincere gratitude that flows from an understanding of the greatness of the work of God in our salvation. Now remember, this is so very important: that what Paul is saying in the verses that we're looking at this morning, flow out of, they are based upon, they are built upon everything that he said in verses 3-14.

Look at verse 15 with me now as we get into the text. Paul says, "For this reason I too." Stop there. "For this reason." For what reason? What he's saying is because of everything that I have just said, look at verse 3 of chapter 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," and then he just unfolds it one great theme after another, one wave of gigantic

truth after another, pounding upon the shores of the greatness of God in our salvation. "Blessed be God. He has done so much for us from eternity past to eternity future and all points in between. Praise be to God!" Now watch this: what Paul is saying in verse 15 is "Because of that, for this reason, flowing out of what I have just been praising God for," he says, "let me tell you what comes as a result of that." He had been praising God for salvation and now what we're going to see is that that worship of God affected the way that he viewed the people of God. That is critical to understanding the force of this passage.

Paul says there in verse 15, "For this reason I too," he's just been completely focused on God and what God has done: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Coming out of that, he says, "For this reason I too," and he changes to a horizontal look at the people that he's writing to. Look at it with me in verse 15. You need to see this. "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints." Having expounded the vertical aspect of this, he says, "Let me tell you how this affects the way that I view you. Let me tell you how this affects my heart for you who are the people of God." What you see is, in the Apostle Paul, what I want you to see at the outset is this: Paul did not treat that salvation as something that was merely his personal possession. Salvation did not make him a self-centered man who was only concerned with how salvation impacted him. As soon as he had expounded the glory of God in salvation, he runs to consider the people of God. He wasn't a silo thinking only about what was within his own heart, he was immediately concerned about the people of God and it changed the way that he dealt with them and prayed for them.

Here's what you've got to see and I realize that in some sense with what we're about to say, we're kind of standing against an ocean tide of self-centeredness in modern Christianity. Churches gladly tell people, "We will give you what you want. We'll give you the coffee and donuts you want if you just show up at our church and we'll tell you what you want to hear. This is all about you. You. You. You." So you condition people to be very self-centered and even selfish in their interaction and their thoughts about Christianity means. It's about what it means for your life, for your heart, for your struggles, for your trials and for whatever would make you happy in a very individualistic marketing term of just self-centeredness so that they can get people inside the doors. It's terrible. It is an absolute contradiction of the spirit that you see in the Apostle Paul. If the Apostle Paul had been set up by that kind of mentality about theology, he would have gone in and started talking about himself at this point but what true salvation, what an idea of the work of God in salvation did, was it made him look beyond himself to the people of God and it made him thankful. It made him pray for them. It made him concerned about their well-being. Here's the thing, beloved, this is what you've got to see and, O God, help me express it well right now: for those of us who have received true salvation, we have been converted under the power of the Holy Spirit to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, what that does is it separates us from selfish pursuits. It separates us from a selfish mindset and we so love and we so praise God for what he has done – watch this – that we become identified in our hearts with his purposes. What he wants becomes what we want. His purposes in the people of God become what we are concerned about and what we seek also. Rather than making us selfish, it makes us

selfless. It makes us concerned about what God is doing amongst his people that we have interaction with and what we see around us.

This is what we see going on in the Apostle Paul. He loves God for the work that God had done in his life and the greatness of salvation and now his mindset is that, "The work that God had done in my heart is what he has done in the hearts of others as well. This is bigger than me," in other words. Your idea of salvation should be, "It's wonderful to be saved but the purposes of God are a whole lot bigger than me. They're a whole lot bigger even than our church," although we're grateful for all that the Lord is doing. God is doing a magnificent work and we need to see our hearts stretched out and expanded to love the fullness of what God is doing, not just in how it intersects with my personal life. That's what happens when you identify yourselves with the purposes of a big God, your heart gets bigger than your own life. This is what we see in Paul. The work that God had done in Paul, he had also done in Paul's readers and that caused Paul to rejoice and to seek their well-being in prayer.

Look at it in verse 15 with me again. "For this reason." This is the connection between what we saw in the last 12 verses to what we're seeing now in the rest of chapter 1. This is the bridge. Because God is who he is and what he has done, now he says, "I, having heard about the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints." He's connecting the vertical to the horizontal here and he says, "You have demonstrated faith in Christ. You have shown concern for other believers in tangible ways. You show the fruit of true salvation." What that says to Paul is, "That means that you to whom I am writing, you're a part of this great big plan also. Your life manifests the fact on a horizontal plane the fact that you have been the recipient of this vertical gift that I've been talking about in the first half of the chapter." He says, "I've heard of this," indicating that he's not writing from personal acquaintance to them.

It had been reported to him and look at what it does for him. Look at what he does in response to verse 16. He says, "I've heard of your faith. I know about the power of God in salvation. I've heard that it's been manifested among you. You don't know how happy that makes me." In verse 16 he says, "I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." Paul says, "I identify with you. I am grateful for what I have heard about your faith because your faith, your love for other believers, is an indication that this great work of God has been active in your own lives as well before I ever got to you, before I ever picked up pen to write," as it were. So Paul is thanking God. Notice this: he is thanking God for the fact that this great work that he does in salvation has been manifested in particular in the lives of these readers.

Look at it there in verse 16, "I do not cease giving thanks for you." Well, who is he giving thanks to? He's thanking God because God is the one who produces salvation in the lives of his people and so their faith became a grounds for Paul to thank God for what he had done in their midst. He says, "I don't cease giving thanks for you." Now, he's not saying that, "24/7 all I ever do is thank God for the Ephesians. Thank God for the Ephesians. Thank God for the Ephesians." He's not saying something that wooden and mechanical. What he's saying is, "I don't forget you when I pray and when I remember

you, I'm grateful to God for you. I thank God that he did this work in your life and I make mention of you in my prayers." Here's what I want you to see, beloved, and the reality of our own spiritual lives will bubble up to the surface here pretty quickly, our lives here in the 21st century. Where do we start? First of all, Paul did not view this great salvation as a past event in his life that was unconnected with daily life now. Here's what I want you to see: this energized all of his affections. This consumed his thoughts, his affections, his priorities. He so loved the salvation and the God of salvation that he had been writing about in verses 3-14 that now when he sees it expressed elsewhere, his affections go there as well. He is now preoccupied with the purposes of God and he is preoccupied with prayer for the people of God. Not just on a physical level, he is concerned as we will see, about their spiritual well-being.

My Christian friends, what I want you to see is that this is what should start happening in our own lives as well. I realize and I'm as guilty as anyone of turning prayer into a selfish pursuit to smooth out the bumps in my own life. God help me with this problem. God, I am sorrowful here. Help me with this. Whatever we may say about the fact that that may have a place in prayer, what I want you to see is that our hearts need to be big. Our hearts need to be great about the purposes of God and our hearts need to be concerned about the people of God that are broader, that are outside the circle of our little life and how salvation impacts me today. That's what Paul is showing us here. He says, "This great salvation which extends from before time to after time and all points in between, this is so great that it consumes the way that I think. It consumes my affections. And I heard that you have faith in Christ, well let me tell you, my prayers are with you as a result because that shows that you are an extension, you are an application of this work of God. He has done it for you as well and because I so love the purposes of God, I'm going to embrace you in my prayer life as well." There's just this ever growing expansion of Christian charity and generosity and love and concern that pours forth out of the apostolic heart.

As you go through the book of Ephesians, you see it in the beginning. You see it in the middle. You see it at the end. Ephesians in one sense is a big prayer sandwich that is expressing this concern for the people of God and as we're going to see right now, this is to be the model that you and I focus our own spiritual direction after. So we've seen it here in verse 16, Paul says, "I don't cease to give thanks for you and make mention of you in my prayers." Now, how much was this on his mind? He comes back to it in chapter 3. Turn to chapter 3 with me. In chapter 3, verse 12, he says, "we have boldness and confident access through faith in Christ." In verse 14 of chapter 3, he says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you," I'm praying for you again that, "according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." Right here in the heart of the letter, right in the middle of it, he can't stop praying. He comes back to prayer and he says, "I'm praying for you." Notice as we'll see in a little bit, what he's praying for them is that they would understand and grasp the greatness of the love of God that

delivered this kind of salvation to them. He says, "You've got to understand that this is more magnificent than you think. This is more revolutionary in your affections than you've understood so far." He says, "You're in the faith. I thank God for you but there is more for you to grasp. There is more for you to comprehend."

So in chapter 1, he's praying that they'll do that, that God would do that work in their lives. In chapter 3, he's saying, "O God, grant them power in the inner man so that they would see how great the love of Christ is." Then he ends in chapter 6 and turns it, you know, he's modeled this kind of prayer for us and now he commands us, the word of God commands us, to pray in like manner ourselves. Look at chapter 6, verse 18 where he says, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." He says, "You pray for God's people. Those of you that know God through faith in Christ, you pray for God's people." Verse 19, "and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." Paul says, "Pray for the people of God and pray for me. Pray for me that when I open my mouth, I would speak with a boldness that is fitting of the greatness of the Gospel." A good prayer for people to pray for their pastors even today.

So here's what I want you to see: first of all, just from the structure of Ephesians, chapter 1, Paul's praying; chapter 3, Paul's praying; chapter 6, he's praying and he tells us, "You pray too." He says, "I pray for you in a broad way, in a big way." He says, "You pray that way too. I pray for you to know the greatness of the love of Christ deep in your hearts. That's how you should pray too." So here's what I want you to see. We'll step back just a bit here. I want you to see more than just simply the words that Paul is using. I want you to see the bigger picture. The heart of a true Christian is inevitably drawn toward biblical priorities. The heart of a true Christian is inevitably drawn to love the people of God and he cannot help but pray. The magnificence, the excellence of salvation, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the magnificence of their work in choosing, redeeming and sealing us, is so great that it takes over our passions, our priorities and our affections so that what we care about is defined by that, not by our earthly circumstances. The fact that God has a people that he's working this out, makes us concerned because we love him, it makes us concerned to see his purposes carried out in his people.

So the way that we pray starts to expand. It starts to be defined by the purpose of God through the ages rather than the problems of man in the day. That's what I really want you to see, at least at this point in the message is that the greatness of our redemption has such a moving powerful impact on our heart that everything that we care about is redefined than what it was when we were not Christians and it is redefined according to the purposes of God that he is working out in the ages. So what I want you to see, beloved, is that we're talking about here this morning, even though we're talking about prayer, we're talking about so much more than having a quiet time. We're talking about so much more than what you say when you pray. That's incidental to the bigger point. What I want you to see is that everything that we've talked about over the past three months about the sovereignty of God in salvation completely reorients your values so that you as

a Christian identify with God's work and his people and that is expressed even in what you say when you pray, even in what's on your mind when you pray.

Go back to Ephesians 1. It does affect what we say in prayer but it's so much more than that. So what we see here in verses 15 and 16 is that Paul is praying with sincere gratitude for these fellow Christians that he's writing to. Look at verse 15 with me again in light of everything that we said. "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints." What Paul is saying is, "Hold it right there. I see, I recognize, I acknowledge that there is a work of God going on in your midst because your faith and your love are the evidence that what I've been speaking about in verses 3 and 14 are now operative in you and among you. Because I've heard of this, because I love that salvation, I want you to know," verse 16, "I thank God for you and I pray for you without fail."

So beloved, let's bring it into the room now. Let's talk about you and me. Take a look at your heart and ask yourself whether you care about the well-being of the people of God or are you merely concerned with how God can help you in your daily life? This cuts a bit, doesn't it? We all tend to pray selfishly. We all tend to pray in an earth-bound sense. Well, one of the reasons that God brings the Scriptures like this to bear on our minds is to help us see that we need to grow, that we need to step beyond what we've been conditioned to pray by the selfishness of our own heart, by the self-centered nature of Christian publishing and preaching today and to realize that we want to identify ourselves with the greater purposes of God and let that be a moving force in the priorities that we place on prayer and how we pray. Having said that, you know, Paul was writing as an apostle with people under his charge and as the elders were talking this morning during our prayer time, I was reminded again and I want you to know that this is how I've processed this passage in my own heart: what we have gathered together here in this room with you and your families is the very kind of reason that Paul was giving great thanks. What's manifested in the lives of the people in this room, what's manifested in the lives of the people of Truth Community, is a vibrant faith in Christ that nearly 100 of you have put down to pen and paper in your membership applications, gladly testifying about how Christ has worked in your life. What we see manifested is the mutual love that you have for one other, the care. There's a reason why it's hard for you to walk out of here in less than two hours. It's because you're identifying with each other. You love and fellowship and care for one another and I want you to know that as elders, we thank God for that. We thank God for you. I thank God for you. I realize that not nearly as much as I should, that to be able to stand and to teach a people that belong to God, not to me, is an immense privilege and a responsibility. But I see bubbling out of your lives, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, the kind of evidence of a true work of God that Paul is expressing here in verses 15 and 16. Your faith and your love testify to the fact that what is happening in our midst is a very work of God. This is evidence. This is what God's work looks like: faith in Christ and love for his people. You and I are a part of it.

So collectively together, what can we do but say, "O God, thank you. Thank you for your grace and manifesting it amongst the people that are gathered here today. Father, thank

you for that and let's now," as it were, "let's now be mindful to pray for one another for the furtherance of that great work." You see, those of us, all of us together, when we are truly saved, when we truly know God, we're glad when he saves other people as well and we're glad and we rejoice when we see the work of God being displayed in other lives because that glorifies him. That honors him and we're glad that other people are on the receiving end of this salvation. "It's not just me," you say to yourself. "This is about more than me. This is about more than my life." We're seeing an outworking week by week in quiet ways, in non-spectacular ways. We're just seeing a spectacular work of God and he does it in ordinary ways as people talk about their faith in Christ and show love for one another. Here's what you've got to do: you've got to make the connection between the theology that we've been talking about over the past month and a half or two, realizing that what we're seeing in our midst is an outworking of those great themes of salvation. This is how God displays it. Not in big fancy miracles and prayer dust falling down from the ceiling. Not in fog shows and big flashing lights as if the same things that Hollywood could do is what God has to mimic to show where he's working. No. No, it's manifested in the sincere love for Christ and the sincere love for his people that is found when God's people gather around God's word. That is an expression, that is a manifestation of his eternal work that he will carry through to completion. Beloved, we're a part of it. That's awesome. It's magnificent. It's why we thank God for what he is doing and we thank God for each other. We pray now with sincere gratitude. We can make the connection between the sovereignty of God and the outworking in the church and we see that the outworking in the church points us back to the eternal purpose of God. You who are living out your Christian faith in the midst of your trials and weaknesses and sorrows, without even trying to, you're manifesting and displaying the work of God for all to see. Praise God. And we're sincerely grateful for that.

Now, this changes how we pray as well. This brings us to our second point. What do we pray for now? Well, what we pray for becomes defined by the purposes of God rather than so much by earthly need. So our second point, we could say this: we pray for their spiritual growth. We pray for spiritual growth. We pray with sincere gratitude because we're grateful to see the work of God displayed amongst his people and now secondly, we pray for their spiritual growth. Notice how Paul prays as we go to verse 17. He says, "I make mention of you in my prayers," there at the end of verse 16 and then he tells them how he's praying, "That. I pray that. I pray, in other words, and let me tell you what the content of my prayers for you are." Look at verse 17, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." Whoa. Whoa. When is the last time that you went to a mid-week service and heard someone pray that way? "O God, give them a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of you." The scriptural prayers all of a sudden take us into a whole different realm, don't they?

He says, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ," which is an expression even of the deity of Christ. They are joined together and the Father of glory, God who is the source of this glorious salvation that we have; God who dwells in unapproachable glory. "I pray to that God. I pray to that heavenly Father and here's what I ask him to do: I ask him to give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." Now, you

could understand that in two ways. In many of your Bibles, you're going to see spirit with a small "s" there as though he's saying, "I'm asking that God would give you a mental disposition of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." That's okay. It's okay to understand it that way but I agree with the many commentators who say he's asking really for a work of the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes. It's the Holy Spirit who illuminates our minds, who expands our understanding and gives us the mental capacity and the spiritual ability to grasp truth in a way that goes beyond our natural abilities. One writer said this, he said, quote, "The Holy Spirit is the agent who interprets God's activity and enables believers to appropriate what has been accomplished for them."

Here's what Paul's praying: he says, "I'm praying that the Holy Spirit himself would help you have a greater understanding of what it means to be a Christian. I'm praying that the Spirit of God with whom and by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption, I pray that the Spirit of God would do a work inside you so that you would understand the greatness of what I've been talking about in verses 3-14 and how that applies to your heart and life." Here in these next three verses, 17-19, Paul is asking God to help these Christian readers have a greater understanding of the truth that already belongs to them. They still need to grow in their Christian experience. You and I still need to grow in our Christian experience. We need to have a better understanding, a more complete understanding, a deeper appreciate for the greatness of salvation that Paul has been praising God for in verses 3-14. That's what he's asking for.

Look at verse 17 with me. "God, give them wisdom. God, give them an understanding of the knowledge of you so that they could grow, so that they would understand this more and more." If you think about it, those of you that have been Christians any length of time, you can see how we need this even from your own personal experience. When you were first saved, you had a very limited, rudimentary, basic knowledge of salvation. "Christ died for me. I've turned from sin and put my trust in him and now I'm forgiven." That is a clear, true, basic understanding of the Gospel but isn't it true that as you've gone along in time, as you have studied Scripture and as you've been under the preaching of God's word, you started to understand more and more about that? You realized that that basic knowledge means that God is holy and that yet he is merciful and sent Christ to die, that Christ willingly laid himself down for your salvation and that there is more to come in this life and even far more in the life to come. Your understanding as a little baby Christian has grown even in your earthly experience as you've gone on in time and grown in Scripture. You can look back and see, "I've grown from what I first knew." Well, understand this: that is just an illustration of the fact that as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, we just know in part. We understand only in part and while we rejoice in what God has brought to us, we rejoice in the understanding that he has given to us, we must realize, we must understand, we must seek after the fact that there is so much more. There is so much more for us to understand about the illimitable greatness of God, the infinite depths of the ocean of his mercy and his love and kindness toward us. There is so much more for us to grasp and to live out a truly trusting attitude and response to him in the midst of the waves and ups and downs of life. There is more. We want to grow. We want to expand. We don't want to just stay where we're at. We want to grow and experience more of that.

We need that. We have not yet become perfect, Paul says in Philippians 3. Our knowledge is imperfect. Our trust and our obedience is imperfect. So Paul comes alongside these believers who are just like us today and he says, "I am praying that God would expand your understanding so that your experience in the Christian life would be fuller and richer than you've known to date. Every one of us can be the beneficiary of prayers like that because every one of us have more that we can excel in; more where we can grow; more in where we can rejoice. That's what Paul is praying for. Paul wants to see God glorified in the lives of his readers because Paul loves God. Now watch this: Paul wants to see his readers flourish in Christ because he loves his readers as well. It's not just that he cares about theology. He cares about the people whom God has saved and it shapes the way that he prays. Think about it this way: I think that it's true that what we pray for if we could hear ourselves pray, what we could pray for is an expression of what we most want, at least at that moment. What Paul was praying for, what Paul says, "What I really want, I want to see your flourish and I want God to expand and develop and deepen that work in you. That's what I want." We pray about the things that we care about. Your priorities are defined on your knees before God. What you're asking for is a reflection of what you want and what we see here in Scripture is that what we want, what we should want, what should be defining the affections of our heart, is the purposes of God and the people of God.

What Paul is praying for as we're going to see the content of his prayer now here in verses 18 and 19, but just to give you a little bit of an overview before we get to it. What we're about to see is this: Paul is about to pray not that they would get something additional to what they already have in the sense that they need a second blessing from the Spirit. That's not it at all. What Paul is about to pray is that they would appropriate what God has already given to them. That they would better draw on the resources that God has already given them in Christ. They need to grasp the significance of what it means to be a Christian. Look at verses 18 and 19 with me. He says in verse 18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."

Notice the indications here right in the text that show you specifically what Paul is praying for. Look at verse 18 with me, put your finger on the text and follow along with me. He says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know," number 1, "what is the hope of His calling," number 2, "what are the riches of the glory," number 3, verse 19, "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." He says, "I want you to know this hope. I want you to know these riches. I want you to know this power." Those three petitions help us see the priority of how we pray for the spiritual growth of other Christians. We see what it is that Christians are supposed to be focused on. We see what it is that our heart affections are drawn to. As we contemplate these things, as we pray for these things for each other, we're seeing what it is that is supposed to define everything that we value in the Christian life here on earth and it has very little to do with our physical circumstances.

First of all, what does Paul pray for? He says, "I pray that you would know," look at the middle of verse 18 with me, "I pray that you would know what is the hope of his calling." Now, we already have this hope. We already have the reality, the certain expectation that one day we're going to be with the Lord and share in his glory. God has already sealed us for the day of redemption. We looked at that last week. That already belongs to us as Christians. He's not asking that we would be given the hope of glory, he's praying that we would know what that hope is. He's praying for a spiritual enlightenment, a better grasp of the realities of Christian salvation. Remember, this is the prayer of Paul to God. We are getting a window, an inspired window, into what God cares about as expressed through an apostle who was praying for the people of God. This is what matters in the Christian life. Paul says, "Pray that you would know what is the hope of his calling." He says, "I pray that your mind would be engaged with and love and expect the fact that one day in the future you are going to be in glory with Christ and I pray that you would not only understand that but that it would shape the way that you view the entirety of your earthly existence, that you would see this life as simply moving toward the fulfillment of the hope, that certain expectation, that God laid hold of you when he redeemed you in Christ." He's saying, "O God, help them understand that this earthly existence is temporary. Let them place their hope and confidence and affections in what you have yet to display to them when you glorify them in the presence of Christ. That's what I'm praying. That the Spirit of God would help you understand better. It already belongs to you, now I'm praying that God would help you see it and appreciate it for the infinite gift that it is."

So he prays that they would understand their future hope. That's part of the spiritual growth that he is seeking in their life. Now, let me pause here. I'm going to go on a little tangent here. We'll see how long this tangent takes. I had a conversation this week that helped me crystallize this in my thinking. Paul, you'll have to agree, is praying for their spiritual growth here. Now, if I would ask some of you, "Are you growing spiritually?" many of you would respond by talking about how much you're reading your Bible or how much time you're praying in your life and that's okay, I'm not critical of that. What I want you to see is that spiritual growth, biblically speaking, is talking about so much more than that. There comes a point where you can't read your Bible more and you can't pray more. You know, even if you only sleep four hours a night and there are other 20 hours, you just reach a maximum capacity and there's no more time to give to it. So spiritual growth in its true deepest sense can't ultimately be by those quantifiable measures that are measured by the hands on the clock or the pages in a book that you've read. There is more to it than that. When we talk about spiritual growth, we're talking about: are you cultivating a biblical mind? Are you developing a mindset about biblical truth and what it means to be a Christian that is defining the way that you view life? You know, a person can read their Bible day after day and they can pray simple superficial things day after day and still be a very worldly minded person if they're just viewing Scripture as how it can help them today and how God can solve this or that problem for them. It's so earthbound that the quantity of time in reading and praying isn't producing something different, something that's growing.

Well, what Paul is praying for here is not that they would read Scripture more. I mean, most of them didn't even have a copy of the Bible. And he's not asking God that they would pray more. He's saying, "I'm praying that you would grow in your understanding of what the greatness of the Christian position is." You see, that's the question. That's what we're after. Is your heart increasingly set on the things that are yet to come rather than the things that are here on earth? Is your hope, are your affections, is what excites you, is what motivates you, is what sustains you about what God still has in store for you? You see, that's spiritual growth. That may be reflected in spending more time in the word and spending more time in prayer. It may be reflected in that but the question is: is your heart becoming set upon the things for which God saved you or is your heart on the things of this world? Paul says, "I'm praying that you would know the hope of your calling," because if it were somehow possible for us to pull back the veil and get a glimpse of the greatness of the glory that's going to be ours, it would so overwhelm us that we couldn't think of anything else. Paul is saying, "I'm praying that the Spirit would do that work in your heart without the physical manifestation to your eyes." He's praying for their spiritual growth and he's praying that they would be set upon their hope in Christ.

Secondly, he says, that's the end of the tangent, I guess. He says, "I'm praying first of all for your spiritual growth by which I mean that I pray that you would know what is the hope of your calling." Secondly, look at verse 18, put your finger right in the middle of the text so that you could see I'm not making this up. I'm not smart enough to make anything up. He says, secondly, "I'm praying that you would know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. Praying that you would understand that believers are God's treasured possession." We will belong to God on that final day in a unique way. There will be a culmination of all of the purposes of God in salvation and we will belong to Christ. He will be ours and we will be his. As the hymn writer said, "I am his and he is mine." Well, that coming day, that's going to be more fully manifested than it is right now and God is going to take pleasure in his people on that great day. Christ is going to glory in the fact that he has saved us and we are going to be an object of satisfaction and delight to God. We are going to be his treasured possession. It's not just that we will receive glory, we will be uniquely manifested as the treasured possession that Christ bought for God on the cross. He bought us and that's going to be manifested on that final day. We will be displayed as the possession of God. He will banish the wicked. They will be consigned to a fiery hell for their rebellion and rejection of the Gospel and they will be sent away and what will be left will be the people of God in the presence of God and the triumph of Christ on full display. That those that he came to save, every one of them, was rescued. Those that he came to save, every one of them was delivered to heaven on the final day and the purpose of God and his people will be fulfilled to perfection without a single failure and our position with God will be manifested.

Paul says, "I'm praying that you would understand that. That you would understand that God sets a high value on the church. That he chose us in the beginning for that coming final purpose. We are an inheritance that will never be taken away." This just totally redefines why we're here, doesn't it? This totally redefines why we exist. I mean, our jobs

and our families and everything are great, they're important. We need to be faithful to that but they are secondary. It's all secondary to this greater eternal purpose of God. It's going to be certainly manifested.

Paul prays for a third thing, a third and final thing here. He says, "I'm praying that you would know your future hope, that you would know your position with God," and finally he prays that they would know their power from God. We'll kind of bleed over into next week with this one as well. Paul says in verse 19, "I pray that you would know," put your finger on it, "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." He goes on and say, we'll deal with this more next week, "These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead." What is he saying here? Let me make it real simple: what Paul is praying for these readers and what the work of God is and what we pray for each other now, what the spiritual reality is is this: he says, "I want you to understand, I want the Spirit of God to help you understand that the operative power in your spiritual life as a Christian is the exact same power that raised Christ from the dead." God did a miraculous work by his supernatural power when he raised Christ from the dead and resurrected him never to die again. What Paul is saying here is, "I want you to understand that the power that gave you new life is that exact same power. What is at work in you as a Christian is the same resurrection power that energized a dead body and brought it to life."

Look at it with me. Let's look at it again. Verse 19, "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." What is that power? "It's in accordance with," it's the same power and Paul just piles up synonyms about power, strength, might, working. All of this energy. All of this omnipotence. It's the same power in you that was at work when Christ was raised from the dead. I want the Spirit of God to illuminate your understanding so that you would realize and understand that you do not live the Christian life in your own power, that it's not just up to you, that God did not abandon you as an orphan and leave you to struggle through life with the bare resources that you could muster up in your own strength. He says, "No. No, there is a resurrection power. God raised Christ from the dead and that resurrection power is what is at work in you." Listen beloved, you and I need to understand that. I know that every one of you need to have this brought to your ears this morning. That's part of the reason why God brought you here. You need to hear this because I understand that life doesn't feel that way. What you feel in your life is the weakness of your trials. You feel the weakness of your response to temptation. You are mindful of the fact that you're still sinful. You're frustrated by difficult relationships that never seem to change. You feel like sometimes you're just walking a treadmill in your spiritual life and you don't see it, you don't feel this, any great power at work. Well, understand that contrary to everything that charismatics would tell you, what you need is not a fresh effusion of the Spirit in your life. You don't need a second blessing from God. You've already got everything.

Look, you must understand this: it's not that you are lacking anything in your spiritual life. Look at verse 3 with me. Ephesians 1:3. You need to see this so that you understand what the aim of our prayers are. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us." Past tense. Period. Completed act. "With every spiritual blessing in

the heavenly places in Christ." When you became a Christian, God gave it all to you. So what Paul is praying for here now as we move over to verse 19, he's not asking God to give you something that God held back, you know, like God had something behind his back and said, "I'm got something more. You just need to ask for it." That's not it. What a trivialization of the nature of God and his goodness to believers to think that he would hold something back from those who were truly his children. What a denial of his grace and goodness. No. Paul is saying, "You just need to understand that despite external appearances to the contrary, the resurrection power of Christ is at work in your life which means that God will certainly perfect you and bring you to the purposes for which he appointed for you before the beginning of time."

There is a supernatural power at work in your life as a Christian that is the same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead and how can you understand that when the external evidence seems to be to the contrary? You need the work of the Spirit of God in your life. When you start to grasp something of this, look, here's where we'll end. I'll put away the rest of my notes. When you start to grasp what we're talking about, this great work of God from verses 3-14, and you start to grasp that there is resurrection power at work in you that guarantees the outcome that you will be delivered to your final hope, when you start to grasp something of that, that's where Christian men and women of courage, of boldness, of valor, of nobility, that is the soil from which Christian greatness is grown. When you realize that God set his mercy on you in Christ, that he gave you everything that you needed to live the Christian life now that supernaturally goes beyond your natural ability and the whole design of that is to bring you to glory, then the whole perspective on life changes. Now you meet trials with courage and steadfastness instead of fear and quaking. Now you face death as a victor, not as a victim. Now you stand firm when the tide of the world comes against us with all of its ungodliness. You say, "No, I will be unmoved. I can be unmoved because I know the purposes of God. I know that there is a power at work in me and I know the outcome and so I'm just going to stand right here where I am." In the words of Luther, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

That is the soil of Christian greatness. That is what we need the Spirit of God help us understand and I thank God that in front of me is a group of people, you, where that power is at work. Now we pray for one another that God would just help us grasp that so that we would live in accordance with it and live worthily of the great call that he's placed on our lives.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your great work in salvation. We praise you for the wisdom that ordained it all. We praise you that you held nothing back from your children but you've given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Now we pray, Father, that you would truly help us grasp the significance of the hope of our call, the riches of your inheritance among the saints. Father, help us grasp the surpassing greatness of the power that is at work in us, that very same power that raised Christ from the dead. Lord, as we look to the future in our own lives and in this body, we pray that you would so

settle these things in our heart and so root us and ground us in the love of God which provided it all for us, we pray, Father, that that would lay the foundation as we grow in this wonderful soil of Christian truth, that we would become giant oaks of strength in the midst of what is to come. Help us to live lives that are worthy of your glory and help us to love and pray for one another as we do. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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