

Praying for Each Other

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 1.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians. You know, Sinclair Ferguson wrote that while Romans is the most impressive of Paul's letters, Ephesians is probably the most elegant.

And in his commentary, John Stott quotes John Mackay, who was a president of the Princeton Theological Seminary in the States, but who grew up in the Highlands.

And he describes this letter as Truth That Sings, doctrine set to music, and the most contemporary book in the Bible.

We're going to read the first chapter together now. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 25] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him, who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who are first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is a guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

[3 : 00] For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and your love towards all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom, and a revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might, that he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come, and he put all things under his feet, and gave him his head over all things, to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him, who fills all in all.

Amen, and may God bless to us, that reading from his word. The first half of this chapter, in fact, up to from verse 3 to 14, it's just a great statement of the grace and love of God, and saving his people, and in the original Greek, it's all one sentence, there's no commas, or no way to, no punctuation marks at all.

It seems as if Paul got carried away, and he just spoke, and spoke, and spoke, and it all became one sentences. In these verses, Paul rejoices in what God has done.

Verses 11 and 12 there, if you have it in front of you, you'll see that we've obtained an inheritance, having been predestined, to the purpose of him who works all things, so that we might, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be to the praise of his glory.

And in verse 13, we have been sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit, who is a guarantee of our inheritance, to the praise of his glory.

[5 : 37] This great statement, Paul just was enthusiastic, as he summarised the gospel, in these verses. And then he goes on into verse 15, and he prays.

And he says, for this reason, and he says, I have not ceased to give thanks, and to pray for you. And we're going to think this morning, about prayer, as in Paul's, learn from Paul's prayer here.

He points to Holloway, first of all, he turns information about them into prayer, he gives thanks for them, and then he prays.

He prays that the Ephesians might know God, that they might understand their Christian hope, and that they would know the power at work in them, the power of God at work in them.

So, Paul prays for the Ephesians. First of all, let's think briefly about what he had heard of them.

[6 : 53] Now, Paul knew the church in Ephesus. He had spent nearly three years working there, but it might have been a few years before, and he had received news of them, and he was really thrilled by the news.

And in verse 15, he tells us what he had heard of them. He had heard of their faith, and their love for all the saints. The marks of true Christians.

Their faith, obviously, in Jesus Christ, and their love. A true confession, a true grafting in to the vine, will, always changes us.

The fruit we're going to bear is different fruit. And, in our relation to our neighbours, and brothers and sisters in Christ, there is a love to all the saints.

Now, if these two relationships don't change, then we're deceiving ourselves. Our relationship to Jesus, faith, our relationship to the brothers and sisters in Christ, we're deceiving ourselves if we're thinking that we're Christians, and those relationships have not changed.

[8 : 10] Our profession of faith is hollow. But Paul saw these real marks of true faith in the Ephesians and believers. And, this prompted him to pray.

He rejoiced to see the marks of true faith, but he still prayed for them. As you see, the Christian prays. Christian prays. That's why we meet together on Wednesday night, to pray.

And Paul always prayed for the churches that he had planted. And what did he pray? What did he pray? That's what I want us to think about this morning. But first of all, he began by giving thanks for them.

First part of the chapter, I've already said, was a great eulogy of praise. In all one sentence, a golden chain of many links, a magnificent gateway to the book.

So Paul, having given praise to God, gives thanks. gives thanks. He praises God for what he has done for the faith and the love that he sees in them.

[9 : 26] In verse 12, he says that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

So he praises God for these believers. They were monuments to mercy, we might say. They were living examples of God's mercy.

The hymn writer wrote, A debtor to mercy alone, of covenant mercy I sing, nor fear with thy righteousness on my person and offering to bring.

The terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do. My saviour's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.

In chapter 2, verse 4, he talks, he writes, God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

[10 : 35] By grace you have been saved. And then he goes on to say, and has raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Paul, you see, marvels at what God has done in the lives of every Christian, but this time he's marveling of what God has done in the lives of these Ephesians.

Dead they were in sin, now alive, seated now with him in heavenly places. Oh, how the grace of God amazes me, the hymn writer wrote.

He prays God for what God had done in the Ephesians and what he could see in that prayer. and that, his praise led into prayer.

Now, Paul wasn't praying for their salvation. They were already God's people. Verse 13, in him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, he believed in him and was sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

[11 : 50] They were already Christians, but he's praying because he wants them to grow in their Christian lives. He wants more for them. He prays for them because he loves them.

They, they had love for all the saints, we read in verse 15. Paul too had love for them. If prayer is a mark of our love, we must ask ourselves, how is our prayer life?

if our prayer lives are weak, is it because we love him only a little? And we love the brothers and sisters and church only a little?

And we love the lost around us only a little? How is our love? May God give us the desires of Cowper in his hymn. He said, Lord, it is my chief complaint that my love is weak and faint.

Yet I love thee and adore. Oh, for grace to love thee more. That should be all our, the prayer of all our hearts. Oh, for grace to love thee more.

[13 : 03] Oh, for grace to love thee more. Paul gives thanks for the Ephesians believers. He loves them and then he prays for them. Verse 17. He prays that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

He prays that they might know God more. Now, as believers, they already knew God, but Paul wanted them to grow.

We never finish, do we? We never arrive, as it were. We can never know all there is to know of God, his nature, his love to us, his power and his glory.

God is infinite and eternal. We are mortal and finite. We cannot know all of God, but we can continually grow in our knowledge of him.

It's a challenge for us, isn't it? Am I growing in my knowledge of him? Are you growing in your knowledge of him? He is a speaking God. He has given us his word.

[14 : 13] He has revealed himself to us in nature, but he is a speaking God especially. But here Paul prays that they will have the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, because we need the Holy Spirit to guide us and to teach us to enlighten our hearts and our minds.

But we need to do our part. We need to fill our spiritual eyes with the wonder of our Saviour and the wonder of our salvation.

We need to find out the greatness of our salvation. Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art. I am finding out the greatness of thy loving heart.

Thou hast bid me gaze upon thee and thy beauty fills my soul. For by thy transforming power thou hast made me whole.

Do we fill our spiritual eyes with the glory of our salvation? Do we meditate on him? That's what Paul wanted for the church in Ephesus, that they might know God, more, that they might have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

[15 : 50] Now, Ephesus. Ephesus was not an easy place to be a believer. If you remember the story when Paul was in Ephesus in Acts, there was a riot.

The goldsmiths of Ephesus were upset at Paul because they thought he was going to ruin their business. People were all going to stop buying idols of Diana, the goddess Diana.

And there was a riot. And Paul had to leave the city at that time. So the believers were a small and marginalized group in Ephesus.

They were not liked. So what did Paul pray for them? Something practical perhaps? Did he pray for better police protection?

They would have a policeman around the synagogue or the lecture hall of Tyrannus when he was lecturing there to keep them safe?

[16 : 58] Sympathetic town rulers? No. He didn't pray for any of these things. He wanted them to find their strength in their vision and knowledge of God.

Paul knew that that's really what they needed. This would strengthen them in the face of persecution. This would enable them to stand firm in the face of a hostile time.

Along with that clearer vision of God, Paul prayed that they would understand the Christian hope better. Look at verse 18.

You've got a Bible there. Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

So he prayed that they might know the hope to which Christ had called them. They would know the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

[17 : 57] And then in verse 19, what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the working of his great might.

So he prayed that they might know the hope to which Christ had called them. What's the hope to which Christ has called them? It's the hope of heaven.

Ultimately, isn't it? The hope that we will be with him, that we will see him, that we will know him, that we will like him. But this hope isn't just wishful thinking.

As many would say, pie in the sky when you die. This hope is the assurance of our reality which is ahead of us. For eye has not seen.

The things that God has prepared for those who love him. The heavenly world is ours already because of the spirit in our hearts.

[18 : 58] We saw that the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of our inheritance. The hope to which Christ has called us. The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

God has two ways of looking at this. It could mean the riches of the great inheritance we have in God. The psalmist wrote, Whom have I in heaven but you?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire beside you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. once we were slaves to sin.

Now we are members of the household of God. We've got a place at the family table and in God's eyes we are already there.

I read chapter 2 verse 4 already. Look at verse 6 there, or verse 5. Even when we were dead in our trespasses he made us alive together with Christ.

[20 : 10] By grace you've been saved. He raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. See, in God's eyes, in the spiritual world, we are already there.

We're seated with Jesus. Well, where is Jesus? Where is Jesus? Look at verse 20. Look at verse 20.

God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that could be named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

We are seated with him. So we're seated with him in the heavens. He's at the right hand of God and we are there. Such is the riches of our inheritance.

One of the great truths of Christianity is our union with Christ. We are in Christ. Like the branch well grafted into the vine, we have become part of the vine and all that Jesus has attained is ours.

[21 : 31] He is seated at the right hand of God and we are there with him. Isn't that an amazing thought? Isn't that an amazing thought?

We're down here in Livingston which doesn't feel sometimes like as if we're seated in heavenly places. We need to have our spiritual eyes opened.

But you know, even more amazing, it could mean the fact that God regards his people, us, as his treasured possession. they shall be mine, Malachi 3.17, they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession.

We are God's treasured possession. Because God's inheritance in us and our inheritance in him are really two sides of the same coin, you can see how they can both be true.

It's just amazing, isn't it? How God should consider us poor sinners as his treasured possession. Jesus looks at us and he says they're mine.

[22 : 46] I died for them. I redeemed them. I risen for them. I am making them like me. One day they will be with me in heaven. They are my treasured possession.

And he prayed in verse 19. He prayed that they might know the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him in heavenly places that they might know the immeasurable greatness of his power.

You know when we first come to Christ we see only part of the gospel and we understand part of it. We understand the wonder of God's forgiveness and love and we're filled with joy and thankfulness that God Jesus has forgiven us and we're in the family of God.

Paul wants the Ephesians to know that and he wants them to know more. To know more so they can be filled with even more wonder and confidence. Now these weren't novices in the gospel.

We already mentioned that Paul was there for nearly three years. He taught them every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

[24 : 20] What a Bible school that would have been. To sit there under Paul's teaching every day yet even for them there was more to learn more to wonder more to worship more to give them confidence.

The power that was at work in the Ephesians was the power that raised Jesus from the day and seated him at God's right hand. That's the power.

Many early Christians suffered physically, emotionally and financially because of their faith. They were mocked, publicly reproached and afflicted, put in prison, thrown to the lions, joyfully accepting the plundering of their goods.

These believers needed to know that the one who was in them was stronger than the one who was in the world. So do we, don't we?

we might feel like a very small minority in West Lothian but the one who is in us, the one who is with us, the one to whom we are grafted if we are Christians is the one who is stronger than the world.

[25 : 41] So Paul stressed that the power in them was stronger than death. It was the power that raised Jesus to heaven and put all things under his feet even those who were oppressing the church.

Those who were worshipping Diana, those who were commercial interests made them oppose the gospel. They could not oppose this power.

So when we come to God in prayer, we're not praying, in some ways we're not praying from a position of weakness, we're praying from a position of our own personal weakness but we're praying from confidence in the power of God.

The world has turned us back on God. We seem small and weak but God is strong. And the power that works in us, here in Livingstone and in Trotterish, it's the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

And we can rejoice in that power among us here. Nigel and Janice. That is the power in which we pray and for which we pray that God will move and show his power among us.

[27 : 01] So can we learn perhaps to pray as Paul did, pray for each other, to give thanks for each other, to pray that we may all grow in our knowledge of God, pray that we may all understand better our hope in Christ, pray that we may understand the riches of our inheritance in Christ, and pray that we may know the greatness of God's power that is at work within us.

So here's a model you see, a model for all of us, how we should pray for each other, a model how we should pray for Nigel and Janice as they move to sky tomorrow.

Amen, and may God bless his word. Let's pray. Father, I really thank you that you're building your church, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

From our seemingly weak position, we rejoice that you have chosen the weak things of this world to confound the mighty, and that your power is strong, and your touch has lost none of its ancient power.

power. So Lord, encourage us in this, and Lord, make us a people who pray, a people who pray for each other, and your wider church, a people who pray for our country and our neighbourhood, that your name may be glorified in us.

[28 : 34] We ask it, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.