

**CHURCH IMPROVEMENT: BUILDING A CHURCH  
THAT HONORS GOD AND LOVES PEOPLE  
THROUGH PASSIONATE PRAYER  
Ephesians 1:15-23**

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

**INTRODUCTION**

What seem to be the greatest hindrances in your life to having a consistent, daily time of prayer?

Most of us would agree with Eugene Peterson says about us, "Busyness is the enemy of spirituality. It is essentially laziness. It is doing the easy thing instead of the hard thing. It is filling our time with our own actions instead of paying attention to God's actions. It is taking charge." We know we ought to stop and pray but everything else seems so much more urgent. Yet, when we read the letters of the apostle Paul it is very apparent that, busy man that he was, he spent lots of time praying. The passage we are looking at today is a prime example. He says about the Ephesian Christians, "...I have not stopped giving thanks for you, mentioning you in my prayers..." He expects this same commitment to prayer from all of us as he ends the book of Ephesians by saying, "...with this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints..." We are going to examine Paul's prayer here in Ephesian 1 to discover what it is that motivated him to be so passionate about prayer.

**STUDY**

**1.** Paul begins by stating "For this reason..." What is the reason he never stops thanking God and mentioning them in his prayers?

*"For this reason" points both backwards to what Paul has said in vv. 3-14 and ahead to what he says immediately following, "ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints."*

**2.** Make a list of all the things that Paul say about God and his saving us "in Christ" in vv. 3-14.

*He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. He chose us in Christ before the world was created. He chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight through Christ. Out of his love for us he predestined us to be adopted as his sons and he did this because it made him happy to do so. He did it to show off his glorious grace. He gave us his grace, his unmerited favor in and through this Son whom he loves. In this Son, through his bloody death, we have gained redemption, the forgiveness of all our sins. This forgiveness is not some stingy act that God did against his will but in accordance with the riches of his grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. He hasn't left us in the dark about what he is doing but has fully explained his plan for our salvation and for the future of the world. He has told us his plan to bring the entire universe under the control of this son who shed his blood for our sins. This one who chooses us and predestines us is the one who is working out everything in the universe in conformity with the purpose of his will. He rules over tsunamis and governments and economies and jobs and health and children and...everything. There is nothing going on in the entire universe that is not going exactly according to his plan. This includes the salvation of everyone who believes in him. Again, he has done all this so that his glory is praised. The "us" in these verses is everyone who has heard the gospel and believed the good news about Jesus Christ. All of these amazing things are true for all who trust in Jesus as the one who obeyed God's law for them and went to hell for them. All who believe are sealed with God's Holy Spirit and experience him as God's down payment on heaven. By this Spirit we are God's very own possession and are being kept safe until the end of all things when Christ returns. Again, he does all this to the praise of his glory.*

**3.** How would what he says here motivate him to passionate prayer?

*Paul is saying that the reason he is praying for them is because God is working out a plan in the world that includes their salvation. God chooses people, predestines people, adopts people, forgives people, redeems people, seals people with his Holy Spirit and so Paul prays.*

*Paul prays because God has saved them and will save them apart from anything they have done, according to the pleasure of his will.*

**4.** Does knowing that God has predestined whom he will save from before the creation of the world motivate you or demotivate you from prayer? Why?

*Most people think that if it is true that God chooses and predestines who is going to be saved then it makes no difference whether or not I pray or do anything. The natural, human response to God's sovereign predestination is to say, "What's the point of praying? God has it all figured out and nothing I do matters, so why bother?" That is exactly the opposite of how Paul reasons. He reasons that since God is the one who is in charge of who becomes a Christian and who makes it safely to heaven, then he needs to ask God to save people. Paul prays because of God's sovereign grace that determines freely who will be saved. If you don't accept that God chooses and predestines those who go to heaven, then you can't pray this prayer.*

**5.** How does Paul's hearing about their faith and love motivate him to pray? Clue: when do you thank people?

*You express gratitude to someone when they do or give something that benefits you. There are two remarkable things to see in Paul's saying thank you to God for their faith and love. First, why do these people believe in Jesus and love Christians? God is the one who created their faith in Christ and their love for other Christians. God so worked in them that he overcame all their hatred of Christ and gave them hearts that trust and love Jesus. Paul thanks God for their faith and love because he knows he gave them their faith and love. The second remarkable thing is this: Paul views God's saving the Ephesians as benefiting him personally.*

**6.** Why does Paul view the salvation of these people as benefiting him, personally?

*Paul's greatest joy in life is for God's reputation in the world to increase. He loves God and is absolutely convinced that God is the best and greatest of all beings. Therefore, when God's name is shown*

*to be great he is happy. Every parent and grandparent understands this emotion. What parent isn't delighted when their son or daughter does well in school or in playing an instrument or performing in a play or mastering some new skill? When a coach or a teacher or some other person has helped your son or daughter to excel, don't you thank them for helping your child succeed. We rejoice when the "glory" of those we love is revealed and thank those who enable them to succeed. In this case Paul is excited about God's name being made much of and God is the one who caused his name to be made much of, therefore, he thanks God for increasing the glory of his name in the salvation of the Ephesians, thus making Paul happy.*

**7.** Do you regularly thank God for his saving others? Do you thank him for your own salvation? Why or why not?

**Passionate, persistent prayer characterizes those who are motivated by God's sovereign grace.**

Here is a literal translation of vv. 17-18a, "...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give to you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, through the eyes of your heart having been enlightened so that you know ..."

**8.** What is the main thing he is asking for?

*He is asking God the Father to cause the ministry of God the Holy Spirit to be more effective in opening the eyes of their heart so they might know him better. If you were to ask Paul what these Christians needed more than anything else, he would answer they need a greater, more effective work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The work has begun but his ministry needs to be of greater effect in their lives. Paul knows that the work of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life is progressive. When you become a Christian you are not born a mature Christian. The Holy Spirit gives you life and he is the one who causes that life to mature in you. Paul knows this and so he prays that God the Father would send God the Spirit in greater power and effectiveness.*

**9.** What is the main thing Paul wants the Holy Spirit to do for them?  
Clue: what does a young man mean when he tells a young woman he wants to get to know her better?

*Paul says that when the Holy Spirit is at work, the eyes of your heart are being enlightened and you are knowing things. What these two phrases are referring to is not simply knowing some facts or seeing something new. Rather they are indicating that the Holy Spirit gives us a new sense of things. He gives us new tastes, new appreciations. Like when a young man tells a young woman, "I'd like to get to know you." He doesn't mean, "I want to know the facts about you." He is saying he wants to grow in his affection for and delight in who he discovers her to be. It involves perception or the learning of facts but it is far more than that. It means that I grow to love and appreciate what I learn. That is what we are asking for when we ask the Father of glory to give us and others the Spirit of wisdom and revelation through the eyes of your heart being enlightened so that we and others might know. We want to grow in our knowledge of and appreciation for God and his saving work in Christ. You will not know God in this way without knowing doctrine, without growing in your knowledge of the Bible. You must study and read and listen. But while you do these things you are always praying that God would give you the Spirit who gives wisdom and revelation through the enlightening of your heart so you will know him, not just know about him.*

**10.** Is this how you have thought about the work of the Holy Spirit in the past? Why or why not?

**Passionate, persistent prayer characterizes those who are dependent upon the All-powerful Holy Spirit.**

**11.** What are the three things that Paul wants them to specifically know?

*He wants them to know "the hope of his calling", "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints," and "his incomparably great power for us who believe."*

**12.** What does "his calling" refer to?

*Paul uses the term "calling" as a shorthand way of summarizing everything he said about our salvation in vv. 3-14. The best picture I know of this calling is in John's gospel when Jesus stood outside the tomb of Lazarus who had been dead for 4 days and he called to the dead man, "Lazarus, Come out!" Dead men cannot obey commands. Yet, Lazarus, appeared at the door of his tomb, wrapped in his burial clothes. How did that happen? The power to obey Christ's command was contained in the command, because Christ's word is a word of power. If you are a person who has faith in Christ and love for Christians it is because God exercised his mighty power, commanding you to do what you could never do and then giving the power to do it by giving you a new heart. He called you out of the darkness of sin and death and into the kingdom of light to live a life that is taken up with Christ.*

**13.** What is hope and specifically what is the hope that comes from God's calling?

*Apart from God's effectual call every human being is in a hopeless condition. No matter how much pleasure you enjoy on earth, you are facing an eternity of suffering in hell if you are outside of Christ. However, for all who have been called by God into eternal life, there is only joy and peace waiting. The God who calls us is the God who will make sure we arrive safely at our eternal home.*

**14.** What difference would it make in your life if you had a greater knowledge of, delight in and appreciation for the hope of God's calling?

*If you know the hope of your calling you will be a more joyful, peaceful, forgiving, loving person because your hope will be fixed on heaven, not on your retirement plan, or finding a husband or wife or having children you can be proud of or a job that is satisfying and good paying or friends that never let you down.*

**15.** Whose inheritance is rich and glorious?

*It is not the glory of our inheritance, that is, heaven, but the glory of God's inheritance in the saints that he wants us to know. In other words, we, God's chosen, redeemed, sealed people are his inheritance.*

**16.** What does that mean in terms of how God feels about us and treats us?

*The point is that God values us as he values his son Jesus Christ. We are not valuable to God because of who we are but because of who Jesus is. It is due to Jesus' perfect life and his willing death that he considers us his inheritance. We are in Christ and so God's treats us as we would treat a valuable inheritance. My grandfather, before he died, gave me the rifle he hunted with for 50 years. It is a Model 98, Winchester, 30-30, lever action that was made in 1904. I treat this gun with great respect and care. It is very valuable to me. If we had a fire in our house, it would be the one physical object I would try to rescue once my family was safe. We who are in Christ are God's inheritance. We are always on his mind. He is always watching over us, making sure we are safe and secure. He prizes us and looks forward to spending all of eternity with us in the same way that he prizes and enjoys fellowship with his only Son, Jesus Christ.*

**17.** What difference would it make in your life if you had a greater knowledge of, delight in and appreciation for "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints?"

**18.** What has the power that God makes available to every Christian already done?

*The power that we have been given is the power that corresponds to the power that did these four things: raised Christ from the dead, seated Christ at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms, placed all things under Christ both now and in the future and made Christ head over all things for the sake of his church. The idea here is that because we are in Christ, we share in all of the benefits that God's power accomplished for Christ. Think about what happened to Jesus Christ. Here was a man who claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God but who was betrayed by one of his own followers, was cruelly tortured and falsely convicted by brutal men and finally killed like a*

*common criminal. It appeared, at the end of Jesus' life as if he was an absolute failure, a nobody and a nothing. Yet, now this man who is God and God who became man has been raised from the dead and is seated at God's right hand ruling over all things for the benefit of his church. Out of the most agonizing suffering and apparent failure, God brought Christ to the highest place of power and authority in the universe. In and through all the suffering God was at work, unbeknownst to men and demons, to accomplish the greatest feat in the universe, the destruction of sin, death and the devil and the salvation of his church. God's power orchestrated every detail of Jesus' life, including his great suffering, so that his power could raise Christ to the highest place of honor and power.*

**19.** What can we know with absolute certainty that God's power is doing for everyone who trusts in Christ?

*God wants us to know and love the fact that his power is at work right now for every Christian to bring us into the glory of Christ. No matter how impotent you feel as a Christian or how much misery you are experiencing, the fact is, that if you are a Christian, God's power is at work to bring you into this glorious reality. The same power that brought Christ safely through the trials and temptations and miseries of his life into glory is at work to bring us through the difficulties of our lives into glory. We will one day judge angels because we are seated with Christ. We will one day possess the earth because we are in Christ. We will one day place our feet on the necks of all our enemies and live as princes in the eternal kingdom of God. We know this because the power of God was exercised in bringing Christ into his glory for our sake. That same power is at work in us and for us to ensure we also overcome every obstacle along the way and make it to the heavenly realms to share in the victory of Christ.*

**20.** What difference would it make in your life if you had a greater knowledge of, delight in and appreciation for "his incomparably great power for us who believe?"

**Passionate, persistent prayer characterizes those who yearn for God's people to be happy in the knowledge of him.**