

Ephesians 1:15-23
 Grace Church of Gainesville
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Pray for the Church

One of the biggest hurdles that some new Christians face is learning how to pray.

Often, especially if they have grown up in very liturgical circles.... where much pomp and formalism seems necessary before someone can talk to God.....

They are AFRAID they will do it wrong.

Others are simply ignorant of why they should pray.

Is God like Santa Claus; Where you just give Him your list of what **you want done**, and move on to the next thing in the shopping mall of life?

- Honestly.... sometimes our prayers sound like that don't they?

You remember that Jesus' disciples asked him very plainly; Lord, teach us to pray?

They had heard Rabbi's standing on street corners. They had overheard Jesus pouring out His soul in the night watches.....

And they didn't know where to start.....

So Jesus gave them a **basic framework**, in what is called The Lord's Prayer.

Find it recorded in Matthew 6..... Good place for you to start....

....it teaches us to pray to GOD as His children.....

FATHER

HOLY

RULER

PROVIDER

FORGIVER

So that, (as His children) we can learn to walk in a manner worthy of Him, in relation to Him.

But here in Ephesians;(where we are in our study of Scripture)....

Paul shows us how to pray at both a broader and a DEEPER level....

Might called it Cosmic Praying.....

because He takes us out to the upper limits of reality.... and teaches us to pray what God has revealed in Scripture (about **Christ** and the **church**) into the framework of our minds and hearts....

I did not merely say that he teaches us **about** Christ and the church.....

Paul **does** give us the facts of these realities (praise God for that... for w/o the facts.... we would be subject to every whim and whisper of man)...

But Paul teaches us to ASK God to engrave the reality of who Jesus is.... and who **we are** as **His Body**... into the **operational framework** of our minds.....

So... that TOGETHER....we can **EXPERIENCE** the goodness **KNOWING** the riches of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

So that, TOGETHER... as a church.... we can be filled with the FULLNESS of His **POWER** to fight the good fight of faith and to enjoy times of sweet communion along the way...

So that TOGETHER.... we can be empowered to **make DISCIPLES** of all people.....who will believe the gospel we proclaim.....

....until He comes to gather us to Himself.

- That won't happen.....without prayer.....

UNLESS we **ASK** God to accomplish those things in us... and through us.... He'll take our **lampstand** away.

Unashamedly, I want to join me in asking the Lord to teach us (today) to:

Pray For the Church.

Here is Paul's prayer:

Ephesians 1:15-23

" For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward 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 a spirit of wisdom and of 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 toward 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 as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

Pray for the Church

1. Give Thanks for What God Has Already Done

If you **miss the mark** at work, or in school....or with a creditor.....and you receive a formal letter.... How does that normally start?

"This notice is to hereby inform you that you are in trouble!"

"You have blown it again.... and below you will find the consequences....."

What is **remarkable** about the way Paul deals with churches in the NT, is how (no matter how badly the church is off course)... **or** how **well** they are doing..... He always **MAJORS** on citing evidences of God's work among them.....

Then he brings correction....and adjustment and teaching.

But first He gives THANKS for Evidences of grace.... that are visible...not only from **within** the congregation....but which have SHONE to the surrounding area, like a city set on a hill.

This church at Ephesus.... had a lot of **growing** to do.....

But Paul begins by telling them how He tells God what He is thankful for:

Ephesians 1:15-16

" For this reason, because I have heard of **your faith** in the Lord Jesus and your **love toward all the saints**, I do not cease **to give thanks** for you, remembering you in my prayers,"

Nothing short of a miracle had occurred at Ephesus while Paul had been away.....
 People who were formerly dead in sin.... were made alive by the hearing of the gospel.....

By His Holy Spirit (sent from heaven) GOD had imparted saving faith to these people!

And Paul was THANKFUL for that undeserved gift....

As we will see a little later depicted in baptism.....

The folks in this church were counting their OLD man.... (their sinful nature which they inherited from Adam).... as having been put to DEATH... when Jesus died on the cross...

And they were TRUSTING, that because Jesus has been raised from the dead..... God has counted them as RIGHTEOUS... and will raise them up also unto eternal life.....

They were counting themselves as DEAD to sin.... and ALIVE to God in Jesus Christ...

Paul was **THANKFUL** for that! And we should be too!

Give thanks today... when these two folks are baptized... not to them... but to **GOD** who accomplished their redemption through the sacrifice of His son.....

We love it when people get saved....

When someone is truly converted they will be willing to TELL the world they are now in Christ! Oh, that God would give us more souls for our labor....

But Paul also GAVE THANKS.... for something far less dramatic going on in Ephesus.....

He was praising God that they LOVED one another.

He glorified God that their love for God was proved GENUINE.... legitimate....because (even though it was often painful)... they loved their brothers and sisters in Christ (the ones made holy through the blood of Jesus)...as THEMSELVES.

There is a whole LOT of that going on in this church!

We need to give God thanks.... for THAT is a work of His Spirit....through the gospel...

Make note of things.... even now.... which you can GLORIFY God for... by making mention of His good work in thanksgiving.....

That should always envelop all our petitions.... so that we are not tempted to forget or lose sight of the magnitude of what God is doing.....

Pray for the Church

2. Ask God to Increase our Spiritual VISION

Paul's **thanksgiving**....is the foundation... for what he is about to ask God to do for the church...

I pray...

Ephesians 1:17-18

"**that** the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of 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,.

It is downright dangerous to use the word **spiritual** in America these days.....

For almost no one will understand what you mean unless you define it....

Someone told me that **Target** now sells statues of Buddha and it is becoming chic to put one in your flowerbed.....

If you put a cross in your yard.... you might get sued.... but nobody complains about Buddha...

Eastern mysticism and all sorts of occult practices are **so accepted** now, that you really need to define which Spirit you are talking about.....

It was even worse in Ephesus....

Yet Paul purposely uses **Spiritual** language here....

He is asking God to (in effect) increase their Spiritual Vision....

He is not asking God to give them **additional** spirits....

For God makes it clear in Isaiah 11:1.... that the Spirit of the LORD (the Holy Spirit) is **Himself the** Spirit of wisdom and understanding, **the** Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge.....

The NT... shows us that God first sent His Spirit to rest upon and **FILL** the physical body of Jesus while during his earthly ministry.....

and now (through the risen Christ) He has sent His Spirit to rest upon and FILL His spiritual BODY... the church.

So Paul is asking GOD to POUR more light through the spiritual eyes of the congregation so that they can KNOW Him better....in a FULLER way, in a more **intimate** way....

In a more POWERFUL way, that we might share His glory.

Here's a word picture; that might help us grasp what Paul is asking God to do....

Remember when Jesus healed that blind guy at Bethsaida.....?

First, he took him by the hand....made a **spittle**....laid his hands on his eyes...

Took them away... said... Can you see anything?

Remember what he said? Yeah! I **can**...for the first time in my life I see people....

But, its still real **blurry**.... in fact... I can't really distinguish people from trees...

- Question? Did that man have VISION? Could he see?

Yes! He, could have testified (like another man Jesus healed) "before I was blind... but **NOW** I see!"

But.... like for many of us..... who are **IN** the faith....

The scales have been removed from your eyes so you could see the light of Christ in the gospel and respond.....You are trusting in Christ....

But much of your spiritual life is still **BLURRY**....

It is often hard for you to discern good doctrine from bad.....

You have heard and even learned some things about God, Christ and the church.....

But it still turns out to be FUZZY when you go to block time off on your calendar for Him.... or when you go to manage your finances.....

We SEE.... but we need to ask God to do more **UNCOVERING** of our **spiritual perception....**

Jesus did not leave that man in Bethsaida with blurry sight.....

Mark 8:25

"Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he **saw everything clearly.**"

Now, for some of you, (sadly) in your self-righteousness, as I told that story... you automatically exempted yourself and began to think of others.....

If that is what happened to you; I say to you that you are far more **short sighted** that you realize! You are blind to your own spiritual needs...

You need to REPENT and realize that even little children who are new in the faith can teach you things about God and His love if you will relate to them...here in the church.

Christ is praying for us right now... through the Spirit.... that we (as a CHURCH) would ask Him to increase our ability to SEE Him through **the Portal** of the Holy Spirit...

- Don't BE satisfied with blurry spiritual sight!

When ever you have your eye's dilated, what is the first thing they tell you?

Don't **DRIVE!** You'll hurt yourself and others....

Don't leave here without realizing (no matter who you are) you need **MORE** of God's Spiritual Vision....

Paul tells us why we need that increased:

(v. 18) So that you can **KNOW** several important things regarding, who God has made us to be as a church.....

Be careful! Because many (if not most) of you have already accessed and stored away the INFORMATION.... contained in v. 18-19

But, I want to remind you that **Information** is **NOT** the same as knowledge.....

Information is a collection of data, might even be data about a person.....

But you can obtain a LOT of information about a person (esp. these days), and still not KNOW them.

- Knowledge takes place when the FACTS you have absorbed... become integrated into your PRACTICE of living.... (**Spiritual WISDOM**)

This word **Oida** (knowing) in Scripture almost always carries with it a connotation of **personal familiarity**. and often... mutual EXCHANGE.....

Kent Hughes points out that in the Greek translation of the Gen. 4.... it says that Adam, **KNEW** (oida), his wife, and she bore a son.....

So in a Spiritual and Holy sense..... you have been joined to God through Christ... in order that you might **KNOW** Him....

Not just superficially... but HE is so desirable that you should be experiencing a HUNGER to know Him MORE!

- Pray that for us as a church!

Pray we would not be so satisfied with the status quo of the psuedo suburban happiness....

That our desire to seek after God in a deeper way is quenched...

My devotions this past week:

God spoke into my heart from....arrested me in my complacency....

Hosea 10:12b...

; break up your fallow ground, for **it is the time** to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you."

Three times... here in Ephesians.... and throughout his other epistles.... Paul **prays** the same thing for the churches....

That we would KNOW..... Christ... in the **power** of His resurrection....

That we would KNOW..... (and experience) the **HOPE** of our calling.....

That we would KNOW..... and be **readily familiar** with how eternally RICH we are, having been made partakers together of the **glory** of our KING.

"in the saints.."

Take special note of that phrase.... in the saints.....

God has chosen to manifest the risen GLORY of Jesus Christ... in and among those He has made holy through the gospel....

He has ordained that we ASSEMBLE in worship.... so that we can experience that glory together.....as we lay down our lives in love for the church.

- Would you please allow me as your pastor to ask you to **make sure** you are reading this text correctly??

Reason is (we often are not aware of this it is so deeply ingrained)....

As independent, self made people of a western culture.... who are trained by the world that we **should not** and really **don't NEED** anyone else.....

We will read everything (including the Bible) seeking out the answer to one underlying SUBJECT:

- How Does this help ME.....?
- How can I become a better ME.....?
- How can this help ME accomplish MY goals?

So it is really important that you understand..... Paul is not writing to individuals here for their self-fulfillment He is not **praying** for individuals (by themselves)...

He is praying for **churches**.....

See the reason Paul has to PRAY for these realities to be GIVEN to the church is because we obtain what he is asking God for through Spiritual GIFTS....

In 1 Cor. he tells us that the Holy Spirit distributes **the gifts** of spiritual wisdom and understanding.... and prophesy and teaching.... and discernment....

to different PEOPLE within the CHURCH!

He does not distribute ALL gifts to all people.....

He gives YOU gifts and You another... and You another....

So that TOGETHER as we exercise those gifts..... we get the WHOLE picture of Who God is and what He is doing in and through us....

- So the goal of this sermon.... is NOT for you to become a more complete (well rounded) spiritual Christian.....

It is so that we can PRAY (along with Paul) to give these GIFTS to members of our body.....

So that TOGETHER we can grow up into our HEAD!

Will you.... **Pray for the CHURCH?**

If you do... and as you do... you'll find that you are not quite as tempted to **complain** about her faults or do "dis" her because she is not meeting your needs....

Pray for the Church

3. That Resurrection Power Would **Pervade** Our Ministry

Paul prayed that we would **KNOW**...just how **exceedingly great** God's power towards believers really is....

God's power towards us ... (he says) is in **DIRECT accord with** the power He displayed in raising Jesus from the dead....

Ephesians 1:19-20

"and what is the **immeasurable** greatness of his power toward 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,"

When we get to heaven, one of the greatest astonishments will be God revealing just how **cosmic**.... just how universe altering ...

The **resurrection** of the Son of Man from the DEAD really was!

Satan and all his deceit was DAMNED at the cross.... and he was proven to be a defeated foe by the resurrection.

The atonement for our sin was complete on the cross.... but we were counted JUSTIFIED through the resurrection!

As you watch footage of an atomic bomb blast, it is remarkable to see the shockwaves of destruction.....that **burst invisibly** through the air.... knocking over whatever is in its path....

The SHOCKWAVES of Christ's resurrection.... are STILL flowing today.... invisibly.....through the preaching of the gospel!

And they are not shockwaves of destruction.... but shockwaves of **resurrection LIFE!**

For next week we will see how Paul teaches that we (as a race) were **DEAD** in trespasses and sins.....

But through the preaching of the gospel (whether it be to children this week in VBS.... or with your server at a restaurant or from this pulpit....)

It is a POWERFUL aroma of LIFE ... for those who believe...

But for those who disbelieve.... it is a shockwave of judgment....

Pray for the Church....

That the same POWER that seated Christ in the heavenlies as our HEAD.... will be demonstrated through us....as His Body...

And that HIS NAME would be lifted high above every other Name....

That this CHURCH would be filled with the GLORY of the risen Christ....

Until every last enemy of His, (including death itself) is finally put UNDER His feet in the Kingdom OfGod!