

“Divine Sovereignty and Our Prayer”

Ephesians 1:15-23

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Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ 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. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Introduction

If God is sovereign, why do we pray? When we look into Scripture, we see that God exercises sovereignty as He uses the means of prayer of His saints. As we pray, He carries out His sovereign will. God is absolutely sovereign, but we still have our will, responsibilities, and choices. He exercises sovereignty not apart from or overriding our will but through our will. In the midst of our choices, God amazingly and mysteriously carries out His sovereignty. God’s sovereignty does not mean that you are a robot. It means that you are responsible for your choices and that you will be judged according to your choices. If we understand that logic, we would not ask, “if God is sovereign, why do we pray?” but instead, “because God is sovereign, therefore, we can pray.”

Prayer ought not to be our last resort but our first resource. We do not just pray because we are in trouble, but before anything and everything. We pray so that above all else, He will be glorified in us and through us. Prayer does not necessarily make your life better, but it makes your life impactful for the glory of God. Prayer may or may not lead to happiness, but it will always lead to eternal joy in Jesus Christ. It gets you what you want in your Spirit’s nature. Let us delve into Paul’s logic and thinking process as he prays for the Ephesian church so we can pray for ourselves and for others.

I. The sovereignty of God [15-16]

Verses 3-14 are an incredible description about how we are saved by the sovereign grace of God. After that, in verse 15, Paul writes, “For this reason”. Because God is sovereign, Paul is praying. The sovereignty of God is the foundation of his prayer. The second half of this chapter is Paul’s prayer. God has a plan, and Paul is praying for the Ephesian

church because prayer carries that plan into completion. Prayer helps us to receive all that God has for us.

Richard Foster said, “If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this leads us to prayer.” If we really understood this, we would pray for others because prayer gives far more than what we can give to others. We pray for people because we want them to receive all that is good for them.

Oswald Chambers said, “We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties.” God is sovereign and all-powerful. Why is it important to know this? Because the foundation of our faith is important.

A man was crawling very carefully across a frozen lake because he did not know if the ice was going to crack or not. A few minutes later, he hears a noise and thinks the ice is going to crack. Then he realizes a horse-drawn carriage is crossing the lake. He had very little faith on the ice, but the ice was strong. Think about this situation if it were the opposite. There would be a confident guy walking on thin ice, and he would fall. The foundation of our faith is more important than the amount of our faith.

God is sovereign, so we can pray. More than our amount of faith, the most important thing is the ground of our faith. The amount of faith matters because we can ask for more, but the ground of faith is the most important thing about faith and prayer.

II. The knowledge of God [17]

The structure of Paul’s prayer follows the typical Greek construction. First, he says what he is praying about. Then, he says why he is praying in this way. Paul is praying for something in order that something else would happen. In verse 17, he is praying in order that the Ephesian Christians would know God better. Paul is praying that the eyes of their hearts are enlightened in order that they may know the hope.

A. God [17]

With the foundation of his prayer being on the sovereignty of God, Paul prays for the Ephesian believers to have knowledge of Him. Of course, the Ephesian Christians knew Christ to an extent. The Greek word for *know* is usually *gnosis*, but Paul intentionally uses a preposition beforehand so that it becomes *epignosis*. By using this word, he is praying that the people would have a full, deep, and thorough knowledge of God.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew counterpart of this word is related to marital intimacy. In Genesis 4:1, it says that Adam knew Eve, and she conceived. This type of knowing is so deep that it involves sexual intimacy. The spiritual parallel of this describes those who have eternal life – not just knowing God, but knowing Him intimately. Do you know God in such a way that you can describe what He desires? Do you really know Him?

B. Spirit [17]

In order for you to know God, you need the help of the Holy Spirit. Paul describes the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of wisdom and of revelation.” This means that as we understand the Word, we get to know God. The Holy Spirit uses the Word because we have a relationship with God through the Word. As the Word is digested, we gain wisdom, and in that way, the Spirit helps us to know God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice that it does not say, “ask the Spirit.” These days, Christian song lyrics directly ask the Spirit various requests. There is nothing wrong with speaking to the Spirit, but as we look into the text, we speak to God the Father to use the Holy Spirit to help us. It is okay to pray directly to the Spirit, but the more Biblical way is to talk to God the Father. Just as Luke 11:13 says, if a human father would not give a stone when a child asked for bread, how much more would your heavenly Father give you the Holy Spirit if you asked? As you study the Bible, you can ask God to help you to understand the Word of God through the Holy Spirit.

C. Christ [17]

In verse 17 the phrase, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory” addresses God. But his request is also related to this address. Paul usually uses this method in his writing. For example in:

Romans 15:4-5 – *“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that **through endurance and through the encouragement** of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of **endurance and encouragement** grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,”*

In these verses, Paul is asking for endurance and encouragement. He also writes that God is the one who gives endurance and encouragement. When he uses the phrase, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he is saying that God is the one who gives us our Lord Jesus Christ and fills us with His glory. When we are filled with Jesus Christ, we become glorious or glorified. We become more like Jesus Christ - not in our sin nature, but in our Spirit’s nature. This is what it also means in:

2 Corinthians 3:18 – *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are **being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.** For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*

When you behold Jesus Christ and His glory, you become like the Glorious One.

There is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. Years ago, there was a classic book called Knowing God by J.I. Packer. His point was: Do you actually know God? So many people know about God, but do you actually know him? We need to know God in such a way that He is personal to us. This happens through prayer.

To pray is no small thing – it is nothing less than a sacred pilgrimage into the heart of God. Peter Lundell said, “Prayer is love on its knees.” Be theological and understand Scripture, but when you pray, you do not have to use fancy language. Use personal language, just as you would with close friends.

III. The experience of the heart [18-19]

After asking for a better knowledge of Christ, Paul then requests for better spiritual vision. Virtually everything depends on our sight – both physically and spiritually. Denzel Washington said, “Why do we close our eyes when we pray, cry, kiss, or dream? Because the most beautiful things in life are not seen but felt by the heart.”

A. The hope of calling – the past

The first three chapters of Ephesians are about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Just about everything is indicative. There are no commands or imperatives.

When the Word *call* is used in verse 18, it means that we are in Christ and that God has called us to receive these things. In Ephesians 1-3, we are called to receive as we are in Christ. In Ephesians 4-6, we are called to represent Him for Christ. Ephesians 1-3 is more doctrine, while Ephesians 4-6 is more about the duty of Christians.

Ephesians 4:1 – *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,”*

As we represent Him in this world, we can experience Him every day in the midst of our callings.

B. The riches of inheritance – the future

We do not pray to get God’s attention – we pray to turn our attention towards Him. God is pouring His glorious inheritance unto us. One of the best results of prayer is the awareness of the presence and goodness of God. He wants to pour His glorious inheritance to us and for us.

C. Immeasurable power – the present

Paul uses three different words for power. When he writes, *“the immeasurable greatness of his power”*, he uses the word *dunamis*, which means *raw power*. When he writes, *“his power toward us who believe”*, he uses the word *energeo* to emphasize *inner power*. The phrase *“his great might”* uses the word *kratos*, which is *conquering power*. Paul uses all of the words about power that he knows to display what kind of power we have in Jesus Christ, and he prays that we know how great this is. Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. Because the power of prayer is

in the One who hears it - not in the one who says it - our prayers will make a difference.

IV. The power for the church [20-23]

Based on the sovereignty of God, Paul prays that we know God and that we experience Him in our hearts. Then, we receive and experience this power in the church of Jesus Christ. There are three different kinds of power.

A. The resurrection power [20]

The resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead is now working in His believers. When we die, we will receive physical resurrection when Christ returns, but before that, we receive spiritual resurrection. We were dead in our spirit, but when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, a spiritual resurrection took place.

B. The ascension power [20-21]

When Jesus, in verse 20, is seated at God's right hand, it means that He is placed in a seat of authority. "*The heavenly places*" is a place of coronation. Because we are in Jesus Christ, who has power and authority, He is giving us this power.

John 17:24 – "*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*"

This is Jesus's prayer before He ascends. He desires for us to also be in this place because we are in Jesus Christ. Therefore, as believers in the church, we have the authority of Jesus Christ above everything in this world.

C. The head power [22-23]

This is to describe the aforementioned power more. If God, "*put all things under his feet*", they are also under our feet. We are the body of Christ, and He is our head. We need to live and pray in this reality. Learn to put things under your feet, and rise above your problems. If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it. Instead of telling God how big your problems are, tell your problems how big your God is. God will use your problems to grow and become like Christ.

In verse 23 when it says, "*his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*", I believe this is saying that Jesus Christ is filling His church: one heart at a time. The church is the fullness of Christ, so that we can represent Him. The Bible says that the glory of God fills the earth – we just cannot see it. Only the ones who are hungry and have faith can see and receive it. Our sinful nature fills our hearts with wrong things, so we need to repent to receive more of Him. Be hungry to receive His pouring grace.

God is sovereign, and His grace and His power will never run out. Verse 22 says that all of His sovereign power is exercised to His church and for His church. His divine love is as great as His sovereignty. He uses all of His sovereign power for our good, so we need to pray because prayer stretches our capacity to receive. Repentance empties our hearts, but prayer stretches our capacity to receive.

Conclusion

Whenever I get discouraged, God tends to encourage me in so many other ways. In those ways, I receive letters, messages, and words of gratitude from other people multiple times a day for a week or even two at a time. I believe God does this to show me how He is still pouring out His grace.

Pray so that you will stretch your capacity. Repent so that your heart will be empty. He is pouring right now. Three phrases that sum up Christian life are: (1) again and again, (2) more and more, and (3) forever and ever.

Let's pray.