

Introduction

We all know the internal awkwardness of trying to figure out how to encourage someone. Sometimes we realize that someone is going through a tough time, some sort of a change, or just even an acute moment and we know we should probably say something, but we often don't know quite what to say. We say, "I'm praying for you!" or "I hope you know we love you." Sometimes that simple answer is exactly what they need—to know you are there. We often find some way to connect, to empathize, and to help people know we are for them and they matter to us.

Yet, what do you say to encourage someone when everything is going well? When there isn't something particular to discuss or "fix"? What do you point them towards in that moment?

Some of you are really good at this idea in general—you are good at affirmation for no particular reason. I saw Bren do this often for many of you. I see our elders do this well. Some of you have done that for me and I am so thankful for it! I'm sorry to say, I'm not great at it. It's not that I'm constantly mad at people or disappointed. Quite the contrary! If I have a problem my tendency is not to hold that back, rather, I usually need to learn that all my inside thoughts don't need to come out in those moments. But I don't usually think to say something when I think things are going well. I just plod forward moving to the next place or thing God has in front of me. For me, Philippians 3:13–14 is probably over-realized:

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own [salvation]. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13–14, ESV)

I tend to do this too quickly with every area of my life. I'm looking forward to the goal and the prize, and sometimes I forget to live in the moment enough to repent well, appreciate people, and appreciate and what God is doing. I may joke about it, but it really is a deficit in my life—something I pray God grows me in—and I'm sure it has been hard at times for those closest to me, especially my wife and kids. It is something I want to grow in!

Praise God, Paul is pretty good at this kind of encouragement (at least on paper)! In this section, Paul encourages the believers in Ephesus by praying for them. In doing so, he models for me and you how to encourage one another and other believers regularly. If you are like me, then this passage may be particularly helpful in caring better for others in the normal, good moments. But I think all of us need encouragement on the HOW and WHAT of exhorting one another. Paul points the Ephesians and he points us to particular aspects of God, and he does it through a prayer. Prayer, we will see, is one of our best ways to exhort and care for one another.

Real Faith

In our section this morning we again have one long sentence from verse 15 through verse 23. Today we are going to tackle this whole sentence in one sermon, so let's read it as a whole and then tackle it in its pieces:

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 the 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. (Ephesians 1:15–23, ESV)

Paul has just finished praising God for the salvation of those in Christ Jesus in Ephesus, and he starts with this phrase:

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,

Paul not only has spent a lot of time with the Ephesians, but he has continued to receive reports about them and from them, and something has been characteristic about them in his mind: They have real faith in the Jesus and real love towards one another!

Paul is using language similar to what he has already said in Ephesians 1:1–14 and that we see him use elsewhere—language of faith, hope, and love. This is regular and common language for Paul to use in his letters. We saw this type of language in Romans 5:1–5 and we also see Paul use the same language in 1 Thessalonians and Galatians when he talks about the believers there:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3, ESV)

For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. (Galatians 5:5–6, ESV)

The hope that Paul talked about in Ephesians 1:11–14, a hope that comes from our adoption as sons and daughters of the most-high God, a hope that comes from our being chosen and predestined, is meant to be worked out in our faith in Jesus Christ and love for God and one another. In fact, faith worked out is always seen in love. Love of God leads to love of others. Love God, love others—you may have heard that phrase here before.

When we looked at the book of James we saw that we should be concerned if our faith doesn't have loving works. Faith is alive when it has works that spring forth from it. And importantly, loving one another is crucial to our walk in Jesus Christ! Look what Jesus says here in John 13:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34–35, ESV)

Jesus says this will be how people will know we are his disciples, and this is exactly what Paul is seeing in the Ephesians!

Application

So here is my first questions for us this morning? Do we have faith that is shown in our love, particularly, shown in your love for 'all the saints'? Here, "all" primarily means Jews &

Gentiles. Paul was thankful that both groups could love each other, that they could get along with their differences, in one gathering. But that was the big challenge of this moment of Christianity—that God would be unifying his varied people, Jews and Gentiles, as one in their faith in Jesus Christ. Today we have many other ways that we need to ask this question.

Today we want to ask can we love “all” God’s people in our context? Democrats, Republicans, and Independents? Egalitarians and complementarians? Extroverts and introverts? People who parent exactly like you and people who don’t. People who spend money like you and people who don’t. Pick your dichotomy, they abound! Can you see those differences as ultimately superfluous—amounting to nothing—in light of the glory of what God has done for you in Jesus? And you can you even find it compelling to love across those lines that the largest common denominator that a watching world might see is our faith in Jesus?

Part of what makes Christian community compelling, or part of what SHOULD make it compelling, is that God’s varied people—people of different ages, different preferences, different ways we are made, different priorities at times, different ways of working out our faith in the best wisdom we have—that these people would lay those differences aside every week that we might love and care for one another.

We are entering into a heightened season of this question right now as our political year in the United States ramps up.

And we will talk more about this next week as the elders do a panel on “Politics in the Church.”

THE question you can ask yourself this morning is would someone—if they knew you, looked at your social media feed, how you talked in your conversations offline, and looked at the people you relate to—would they say that you are characterized by your love towards all the saints?

Prayer

Paul’s first comments about the Ephesians in this section should already be moving me and you to prayer! I am not always like that. Paul looks at the Ephesians and sees real faith as demonstrated by love of God and love towards one another. I like what one commentator said about Paul here:

“He [Paul] recognizes that the Christian growth of his readers, as well as the furtherance of his own ministry of the gospel, is wholly dependent upon the living God, who gives generously to his children when they call upon him in prayer.”

So, for Paul, when he sees God at work, his first choice, and really his only choice, is to pray!

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

Here, giving thanks for you is the same thing for Paul as “remembering you in my prayers.” He is restating the idea so we know that thankfulness is what his prayers are about. We are going to see later on in Ephesians 6:18 how Paul encourages us to pray at all times in the Spirit and to pray with supplication. Prayer matters to Paul and it matters for us.

Application

We often think to pray for people who haven’t yet put their faith in Jesus. We often think to pray for people who are in a hard life moment. But do you regularly pray for yourself and those you know simply because you and they are a believer? Because God has loved you and you love God. That is Paul’s go-to choice when he thinks of his believing friends. He sees the Ephesians, he sees they love the Lord and they love one another—in other words he sees real faith—and he is moved to prayer for them!

I think you and I often see one another and are not often moved to pray for one another as a regular habit because we underestimate the power and necessity of prayer!

This is what Paul says to the Ephesians that 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, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened,

Paul harkens back here to the ways he talked about God in Ephesians 1:3–14, the God of Christ, the Father of glory, and—as he reminds us that we have already “had the eyes of our hearts enlightened,” (meaning that we and they are already saved, that we and they are believers)—he then prays that God would give the Ephesians, give us, two things:

- 1) **may give** you the Spirit of wisdom
- 2) and [may give you the Spirit] of revelation

And he asks that God would give us this wisdom and revelation

“in the knowledge of him [Christ]

We know that Paul believes we have already been given “every blessing in the heavenlies” in Jesus Christ. That is part of our election, part of our inheritance, and God has surely done those things through the cross and Christ’s resurrection to power.

What is amazing here is that Paul doesn’t pray for God to give us to have something new! There is no second thing we need to know, no second pouring out of God’s grace and mercy. Paul wants us to press into this knowledge that we have already been given in Jesus Christ. We don’t need a fresh blessing, we need to more fully comprehend and bask in the

blessing God has performed in THE BLESSING he has already given us, namely knowing Jesus!

Paul brings us back to our God who is glorious. This God of glory that we see in Psalm 29:3 and Acts 7:2. This King of glory that we see in Psalm 24. In using this language for God Paul is reminding us that God made all things and all things point to God as we saw in Romans 1. Paul harkens back up to the opening of Ephesians, the ‘father of our Lord Jesus Christ’, again as a reminder that God has already given us every blessing in Jesus, so we can ask boldly—that we can pray—for God to give us what we need to grow.

“God’s grace, power, and glory are unlimited; he is more than adequate to meet our needs.” Peter O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 130-131.

It is our job, as Christians to continue to seek to know and understand the gospel of Jesus! If we are to pray for one thing, it should be that all believers continue to press in to know the breadth, depth, and height of what God has done for us in Jesus (a phrase Paul will use later in Ephesians 3:18). I love this quote, and you have heard me paraphrase it before:

“If making disciples happens through gospel-centered going, baptizing, and teaching, the semantic distinction between evangelism and discipleship is superfluous. Disciples are made, whether for the first or the fiftieth

time, through the gospel.” (Jonathan Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship*)

If our original knowledge of Jesus came through God’s work of choosing and changing us, we still need that same power to work in us that we might grow more in our knowledge of Jesus and all that he is and has done for us.

Do you believe that you need to continue to look to God in prayer, not just for the hard times or difficult moments, but as your constant supply as you keep seeking to know Jesus? If God gave us Jesus in all this power, glory, and mercy, he can surely continue to give us understanding of his power, glory, and mercy today. We have such a blessing that we can look to our God, this God who has blessed us so much, and know he wants to hear from us, he wants to help us, and he wants to continue to grow us.

All this is done in Jesus Christ! He is the center, the object of our knowing, and he is the one who, as we will see, reigns in power and will give us all that we need to know him rightly.

Hope, Inheritance, and Power

It isn’t just anything that Paul is praying we see in Christ. Here he says:

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

Paul says three things here.

- 1) **That we might** know what is the hope to which he has called you
- 2) What are the riches of his [God's] glorious inheritance in the saints
- 3) What is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

These first two are things Paul has said already in the previous long sentence of Ephesians 1:3–14. Paul prays that we might see and know more of our hope in Jesus. Hope that is certain for us because of our calling. It is the hope that we have been talking about for the last couple of weeks—a future in the New Heavens and the New Earth, with our God. This hope is fully realized for us as we look **backwards** to our calling.

Last Sunday we talked about how our inheritance of God's person, place, and grace and God's inheritance of us are ideas that are meant to go together. We talked about how Paul was starting there from the perspective of our inheritance, what we have been given by God in Christ Jesus. But here, in our section this week, we see the complimentary idea clearly. That we are God's inheritance.

That he has us, his people, his sons and daughters, as his possession. Paul is praying that we might see and know this reality better. That our inheritance and our being God's inheritance might be more real to us. And, where our hope is grounded in the past, in our being chosen and predestined, our being God's inheritance and living that reality someday is fully realized in the future as we are with him again in his place and in his presence because of his grace. Being his inheritance is fully realized in the **future** at the second coming of Christ.

Paul is doing something really cool here. He is looking at all of time and space, in every direction—forwards, back, up, down—and seeing it all summed up in Jesus. He looks back to before time and sees us being chosen and predestined in Christ. He looks forward to the end of this time as we know it and he sees it summed up in the second coming of Christ and our life with God as his sons and daughters, his inheritance. And he looks today and sees God's power—a power that is more fully seen in the future but is beginning to breaking into our time and reality now!

This third phrase is talking about the time we are living in now, between the past and the future. Paul says that we should see in Christ the immeasurable greatness of God's power, and we should be seeing it now. And his prayer is that we would see more about this power, understand it better, and treasure it. God is beginning to unpack for me and you, right now, in our lives, both through our salvation and

justification (God declaring us righteous), and also in our sanctification (our being made more like Christ)—HIS great power.

Paul hasn't talked much about power yet in Ephesians (I mean, this is only his third sentence), and that is why he is going to spend the rest of this section unpacking the very power of God that we see in Jesus.

He knows and wants us to see that we live in this moment, this overlapping of ages, where what was promised and set in the past has happened—Christ's sacrifice for our salvation and his choosing of us—and the future is still to come—our being reunited fully with God. And in the middle we see the overlapping of God's power. God's power that is not something only for the future nor is it just in the past at the cross, it is for us today.

This is another reason we pray! We believe the God who moved in power before creation in choosing me and you, in creation itself, through history, in Christ on the cross, and in the future in creating the new heavens and the new earth is at work today in power for us. We can ask him to help because he is listening, he is active, and he is moving.

God's Power Displayed

God's power is what Paul describes in the rest of this sentence: God's power displayed and continuing to be displayed for us in Jesus. This power:

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. (Ephesians 1:15–23, ESV)

Paul is continuing to use direction and spatial language to describe the overall totality of God's power for us. Christ, raised from the dead—moving from LOW TO HIGH. Seated at the RIGHT HAND. Everything UNDER his feet. Him as HEAD (above, over) the church. All this spatial language scream AUTHORITY! This is the Almighty God. The all-powerful God. We can trust in him, we can look to him, we can pray and petition him. There is no-thing, no-where, that Christ does not have authority over.

In this last section Paul shows us two ways God demonstrated his power, and two manifestations of his power. The first demonstration was his raising Jesus from the dead. God had kept people from death previously—Enoch walked with God and was no more (Gen 5:22–26) and Elijah was taken directly to heaven (2 Kings 2). But other than several examples that come from Elisha (1 Kings 17:17–22; 2 Kings 4:32–35; 13:20–21), raising of the dead is associated

with Christ and his ministry (which Elisha points to as well). Christ's resurrection points to our future reality.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4, ESV)

Because Christ was raised from the dead we do not fear death! We can trust God in this life whether we live or die, knowing that to be away from the body is to be with Christ (2 Cor 5:8), and that God is keeping us no less than he kept Jesus.

The second demonstration of God's power was Christ being seated in the heavenlies at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is God! He is over all spiritual powers (angels and demons), and over all names, meaning anyone of any importance. We know that is where he is at because of Psalm 110:

The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." The Lord is at your right hand; he will

shatter kings on the day of his wrath. He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth. He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head. (Psalm 110:1–7, ESV)

Jesus, we are told by Paul, is given the name above all names (Philippians 2:9). This truly is the overlapping of the ages where we see Christ in his power in our life through salvation and sanctification, yet not completely as the ruler of this age is defeated but not yet cast down, and our sinful bodies still fight against our new nature growing in us in the Holy Spirit.

And we are told here by Paul that these demonstrations of power have two main manifestations. First, we see it manifest as Christ now has everything under his feet. He is the new Adam, as Psalm 8 says, who now has all things in his control as Adam was meant to.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man [Jesus] that you care for him? Yet you have made him [Jesus] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. **You have given**

him dominion [this is the language from the garden] over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:1–9, ESV)

And even more, Christ is the head of his church. He is not a detached ruler, but as Paul says here, he relates to us as his own body. He loves and cares for us. There is a beautiful contrast here. All things are under his feet, under his authority. Enemies and friends alike. But his friends are connected TO him. The church, me and you, receive our fullness from being in Christ. We are:

the fullness of him who fills all in all.

“Christ is being filled wholly, entirely absolutely, or in every way by God.” (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 300)

And we are being filled by Christ.

Conclusion

In Paul’s prayer and remembrance of the Ephesians, he is exploding our vision of Christ and specifically all the spheres and ways he is preeminent in this universe. We may not be able to see it his way all the time, but God is in control, and all authority is found in Christ. From before time to the end of

time, and filling up today, God is all powerful and capable. From the grave to the throne of God, and over every enemy as their King and over his body as our loving head, Jesus is in control.

All of this should motivate us to prayer! That is what it does for Paul. Our life, simply because we have put our faith in Jesus, needs prayer. We need to be grounded in the power of God and his past goodness securing hope, his future goodness securing inheritance, and his present good displays of power to us in Jesus Christ. This is the God we pray to!

Friends, I pray you come away from this section of Ephesians knowing there is no reason to not pray. The same God that saved us in Jesus—a miracle of miracles—is still at work in our lives today. And we need him to help us to see and love our Lord Jesus more each day. The God who opened and enlightened our heart and eyes is the only one who can still enlighten and open them.

Friends, see 1) our hope in our calling, 2) our value as his inheritance, and 3) his power working today in Jesus, and pray boldly to God! And because I don't think I have to remind you as much to pray for those in need or those moments in your life when things are acute or hard, I want to petition you today to pray simply for believers and for yourself. For yourselves and each of us here, that we might grow in the one thing we need—our fullness knowledge and

understanding of the gospel of Jesus. I am fully convinced, that if we knew the gospel truly, fully, and deeply, our lives and our church would be radically changed! It would affect every corner of our life and it would embolden us to love our God and love others in ways that would be truly life changing.

Pray

Father, may our prayers become like Paul's prayers. Embolden by our knowledge of you and the totality of your being, as we see in the power and authority of Jesus Christ. A prayer that focuses simply on our being your children, your inheritance, and asking that you might continue to open our eyes and our minds to see and know you.

Communion

Oh, that we would grasp better the fullness of this! Pray to God that we may.

Benediction

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Rom. 15:13)