



Intro video (Eph 1:15-23)

Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of longings and concerns tend to shape our prayers for other people? What do we usually ask God for?
2. In v15-16 what do you notice about Paul's attitude and actions towards these believers? How/why might this be connected to the praise of v3-14?
3. How about us? Do we respond to other believers – and God's glorious salvation plan – like this?
4. Look at Paul's prayer in v17-18. What does he pray for? What does this mean if they already have 'every spiritual blessing' in Christ?
5. In what ways do v18-19 clarify the content and aims of his prayers? How might we put these into our own words?
6. Look again at v19b-23. How might these verses give us confidence in
 - a. The power of Christ?
 - b. The place of the Church?
7. How practically might the rich example of Paul in this passage help shape the way we
 - a. Pray for other Christians?
 - b. Talk to other believers (one another) about how we view and pray for them?
8. How can we shape our group life more in this light?

NOTES

General INTRODUCTION (from session 1)

One commentator writes: “The main theme of Ephesians is easy to summarise with the phrase ‘unity in the inaugurated new creation.’” In other words: in and through and under the ascended Lord Jesus Christ – God has created a new world and a new humanity (aka the church). We see at the outset this is rooted in God’s eternal purpose, accomplished by Christ’s redemptive work and sealed and guaranteed to believers by the Holy Spirit. This full and free salvation by the Trinity must be received by faith alone – and therefore is all to the praise of his glorious grace. But real faith is living faith – which works itself out in love. So Paul calls his hearers to “thoughts, words and deeds” that concretely accomplish the “unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3)¹

In Ephesians we see how unity, reconciliation and peace (with God and one another) can be known and seen even in the heavenly realms. God’s eternal plan – was hidden but is now revealed – “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ!” (1:10), displayed now in the church (3:10).

In very brief outline: Eph 1-3 **You are one in Christ**
 Eph 4-6 **So live as one in Christ**

Ephesians 1:15-23 Paul gives thanks and prays the Ephesians would know God better

- Thanksgiving & prayer – for wisdom & revelation - so that they would know God better (15-17)
- To know (1) the hope of their calling, (2) God’s glorious inheritance in them, (3) his incomparably great power for believers (18-19a)
- This power seen in raising, exalting & making Christ head over all for the church (19b-23)

Having praised God for every spiritual blessing in Christ (3-14), Paul now reports his thanks & unceasing prayer for these believers. **“What Paul does in Ephesians 1, and therefore encourages us to copy, is both to keep praising God that in Christ all spiritual blessings are ours and to keep praying that we may know the fullness of what he has given us”** (Stott). He prays that the Father of Jesus would give the Spirit of wisdom and revelation – for what? **To know him better** (17). Specifically, this will look like the ‘eyes of your heart’ being enlightened (true, deep, understanding and affection at the core of our being) to know (1) the hope to which God has called us (cf 1:12,14), (2) God’s inheritance in the saints (NB Christians are God’s inheritance, as well as the other way round – mind blowing!), and (3) his incomparably great power for/towards us who believe.

How can Christians be sure of the future hope/reward to which they have been called? Well, **God’s power** is more than sufficient to accomplish what he has planned and promised. We see it undeniably in (1) raising Christ, (2) exalting Christ to the very highest place, (3) placing all things under Christ’s feet (cf. Psalm 8:6), (4) appointing him head over all. **NB Power (magic, ‘invoking names’ / powers v21) was a huge deal in Ephesus.** Paul wants Christians to know what true power is and the one name you need to call. And amazingly, for Christians, this power is at work for us (19a); Christ’s universal headship is also for the church. We are not ‘under his feet’, but rather ‘his body’, even his ‘fulness’ – the way in which he fills the world with his knowledge, glory and rule. Is that how we think of being part of the church?!

FOR US: Perspective & prayers. How does this motivate our own thankfulness and prayers for other believers? Reflect on the specifics. **Power & confidence:** Consider the incomparably great power of God at work for us. Seen in Christ – risen, reigning, ruling, head over all. **Privilege:** All this power = “For the church” – inc. us now by sheer grace. What fuel, motivation and encouragement for our prayers!

TEACHING TIPS :

- (1) **Don’t just talk, pray!** Make time, perhaps more so than normal, or at multiple points during study?
- (2) **Make it ‘real’ and concrete.** This power is real. How can we connect this Christ – and this incomparably great power – into the real situations in which we know we need power? Where else do we look?
- (3) **Think & dream about group culture.** Paul’s prayer is clearly a model; will we follow it? How can our group actually talk/pray like this? What about life outside studies? Why might that be hard/scary?

HINTS FOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Just to get us talking; no right/wrong answers but interesting to know honestly. Is it usually: Practical? Urgent? Superficial? Repetitive? Or do we struggle to pray at all? What are our 'usual requests' weekly?
2. Paul is a) unceasingly thankful to God (in light of their faith & love) & b) consistently prayerful. 'Not stopped', 'keep asking'. Crucially he ties it to the eruption of praise previously (vv3-14, but maybe esp. v14). 'For this reason'... having praised God for his big picture saving plans, of course he's thrilled about this specific example of God's saving work in the lives of his hearers. A strong theology of grace and sovereignty ought to lead to a strong impulse of gratitude and prayerfulness towards other believers.
3. Again, this is a chance to be honest. It's so easy in normal life with its challenges and struggles to lose sight of the wonder of 1:3-14 and so lose the wonder of what God has done and is doing in other believers (15-16). Do we realise – in God's cosmic and eternal plans – how amazing every single believer/church is? Active thankfulness & prayerfulness towards other believers is a great indicator of spiritual health & maturity. And a beautiful model to emulate.
4. This Trinitarian impulse of prayer (to the Father of the Son for the Spirit) seeks wisdom and revelation (big concepts in the ancient culture and now) but note 1) this comes from the (Holy) Spirit and 2) it is so that they would know God better. It's so simple, yet so profound. They have every spiritual blessing in Christ, oh that they (and we) would know more and more this great God. It's not 'new revelation', it's deeper appreciation and relational knowledge. **NB this is not asking for 'extra-biblical revelation' – no, in Christ, as the apostles declare, the 'mystery' has already been revealed and disclosed. But how we need to know him more and more.**
5. In this context to know God better is to know:
 - (1) The hope to which he has called us – the future and full blessings of the new creation which are ours in Christ in the heavenly places and of which the Spirit is a down-payment and guarantee (14). Now, by faith; soon, by sight.
 - (2) God's glorious inheritance. What is almighty God looking forward to receive, and enjoy as his inheritance forever? His holy people. It's truly amazing that not only is he our inheritance (14), but we are also his (18)!
 - (3) His incomparably great power – for us who believe. This power is what secures the future blessings/hope/inheritance. It's vital for us to know it's definitely coming! Do you notice it's 'for us'. God's power is not some kind of abstract force used for himself, but his gracious enabling, preserving and acting for the salvation, protection and ultimate good of his people.
6. A) It's remarkable how this final section builds and climaxes. Paul gives much time and attention to flesh out in no uncertain terms the reality and incomparably great power at work in (1) raising Christ, (2) exalting Christ in heaven, (3) subjecting all things to Christ (cf. Psa 8:6) and (4) appointing him head over all. Let's help one another get this into our heads! We want to know if God's power is real and sufficient? Look at 1-4 above. **NB Power is a big theme in Ephesians (see note above). Whatever spiritual powers/names people might have been tempted to call on or invoke for power& protection, the risen, exalted and reigning Christ is far above them all.**
B) Isn't it amazing that God's incomparably great power (v19a) is "for us who believe"? And Christ's headship over all is "for the church". Indeed the church is (not subjected under his feet) but his very body, described as his fullness. How does the fully full one (Christ) currently fill the world with his praise, glory and rule – in and through the church. And we're part of that if we're in Christ. Mind blowing!
7. A) We can look at the specific phrases and ideas – thankfulness, persistence, to know God better, to know the hope & power. To connect the power and life of the risen and exalted Christ to the real life and situations of his individual saints and his body here on earth. There is tremendous richness and depth in Paul's prayer report for us to learn.
B) We mustn't miss the fact that this isn't strictly a prayer, it's Paul's report about his prayer. He doesn't just talk to God this way, he talks to them about how he talked to God this way. This report ought to be a model for us too. Do we remind one another that we're thankful to see how God's eternal salvation plan is being worked out in them? That we're desperate and keep asking God that they might know him better etc?
8. Not to be trite or trivial, but is there one specific thing we could do/try/aim/pray for? Danger otherwise it all sounds good but never really 'lands' concretely. We don't want to be "hearers of the word only".