

“A Prayer for the Church”

Ephesians 1:15-23

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Introduction:

1. Years ago I taught a college Bible study at RPI in Troy, NY. We would start at 8:00 on Friday night and search the Scriptures for 2 ½ hours. At that point I would ask to stop, since I had already worked a full day in home construction. Imagine that! The teacher asks to stop while the students beg him to continue! In that group we had many interesting individuals. One of them was a young man named Tom. I will never forget his enthusiasm for the Lord and his word. When he entered the study, he would greet everyone with a cheery, “Hello saints!”
2. Saints—that is what we are by God’s grace to us in Christ. God has chosen us, redeemed us by the blood of Christ and called us out from the world in order to be set apart for him. We are saints by his grace and for his glory. And the church or the assembly of saints forms the body of Christ.
3. In this section Paul prays for God’s called out assembly of saints. As we study this letter about the church, we will do well to learn how to pray for one another from the ideas set forth in this prayer. Let me say that another way. If we want to know how to pray for each other, what better pattern can we find than the prayers that the Spirit of God has inspired?

Exposition:

- I. The motivation behind praying for the saints (1:15).
 - A. The first motive is that the saints have faith in Christ.
 1. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the defining characteristic of a saint. Many times the New Testament Scriptures speak of “believing into” Jesus—trust or reliance on him. However, here (as in Gal 3:26; Col 1:4; 1 Tm 1:4; 3:13; 2 Tm 1:13; 3:15) the word in signifies the sphere in which saving faith operates. It is always faith in the Lord Jesus.
 2. True, saving faith has Christ alone (Jn 14:6; Ac 4:12) as its object. Now when we say Christ alone, we are not ignoring the Father or the Holy Spirit. Instead we are saying that the only way to God is to trust only and fully in Jesus Christ, relying on his finished work of atonement.

Action Step: The first concern of a minister of the gospel is whether or not his hearers have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. What is your position before God? Are you depending wholly and solely on Christ for salvation?

B. The second motive is that they love one another.

1. When you love someone, you set your affection on him or her so that you seek his or her good in a sacrificial manner.

2. As believers, we especially love each other. This includes all the saints, not just those of our own local assembly, or worse, those of our own little clique. If someone has faith in the Lord Jesus, he or she also loves other believers (1 Jn 3:14).

Action Step: The way you do this is to reach out with open arms to others in this church. You make an effort to talk to everyone, to invite others to your home, and to serve with others in our various ministries. Look around and ask, "What needs to be done and how can I help do it?"

3. This kind of love is the mark of the Christian (Jn 13:34-35) and it is the final apologetic (Jn 17:21). How can the world tell if we are really followers of Christ? They know it by our love for one another. What will impress people about the truth of Christ? They will know that God has sent him when they see us united in love for one another.

Action Step: What positive steps do you need to take to demonstrate genuine love for your brothers and sisters in Christ in this local church? True faith produces love, and that love leads others to believe.

II. The elements of prayer for the saints (1:16-17).

A. Thanksgiving must be part of our prayers.

1. We worship God for saving grace extended to others. Faith is a gift from Christ and love is part of the fruit of the Spirit. These are not natural matters, but supernatural.

Point: You don't thank God for something unless he has given something. Worship includes saying "Thank you" to the Lord for faith and love!

2. Appreciation for the grace that has reached our brothers and sisters in Christ. I am glad that the Lord has saved me; I am also glad that he has saved you.

Comment: A church will not survive long as a church unless it constantly cultivates this kind of praise and thanksgiving. In other words, instead of becoming frustrated with other Christians, why not give thanks for them? Someone might say, "I don't think I can sincerely do that!" Wait

a minute! Would you rather they died and perished forever under the wrath of God? The Lord chose to love them forever, so why don't you?

Action Step: Would you like to change your life and the life of this church? Who are the three hardest people in this church for you to love? Perhaps you don't know them, or don't feel like you have much in common, or even have had a disagreement with them. Spend this week giving thanks to God for those three people.

B. Requests ought to be made for one another.

1. The requests are constantly made. The text says, "I keep asking..." Paul's lifestyle involved ongoing prayer for Christ's people.

2. The requests seek more grace for the saints from the Father—our glorious Father! In his second letter, the apostle Peter commands Christians to grow in grace. Here the apostle Paul prays for this growth.

Action Step: Do our prayers for one another seek increasing grace? It is all quite well to pray for each other's physical needs. But are we asking for spiritual growth of one another? I think our prayers are far too weak in this area. So how can we correct this deficiency? We can change by using a prayer like this for a pattern. Take a fellow saint and personalize this prayer.

III. The content of prayer for the saints (1:17-23).

A. A request is made for an increasing knowledge of God.

1. Observe that when the apostle prays for the ministry of the Spirit, he does not pray for a "second blessing". He prays for an increased knowledge of blessings already received. In Christ we already have all we need for life and godliness (2 Pt 1:3-4). We just need to know in our experience what we already have in Christ.

Apply: I plead with you—don't go looking for a new experience. Seek Christ. If you lay hold of him, you will lay hold of all the blessings God has given you.

2. Paul prays that these believers might know God better. Now, all believers already know God (Heb 8:11). But Paul wants this basic knowledge to develop in their day-to-day experience. He wants them to realize that the glorious Father of the Christ who redeemed them loves them, helps them, guides them, keeps them, and wants them to enjoy him.

Quote: "Conversion is not the end, it is merely the beginning; it is only the first step. A child's birth is not the end; it is the beginning of its life; and regeneration and conversion is its spiritual

counterpart. It is because he knows this, and is aware of the tremendous possibilities that lie ahead of these people, that the Apostle is praying for them.” [Lloyd-Jones, p. 339]

B. A request is made for an expanding knowledge of spiritual blessings.

1. The blessing of hope—The Christian has a confident expectation of certain blessings because God has called him. These are fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), holiness (Rm 1:7), freedom (Gal 5:1,13) and peace (Col 3:15).

Action Step: Is your life energized by the experience of these four blessings?

2. The blessing of riches—The Christian has a forward look to enjoying the riches of the glory of his inheritance. All things are yours in Christ; one day you will enjoy all of them.

3. The blessing of power—The Christian has already experienced the incomparably great resurrection and ascension power of God. Sadly, most Christians undervalue what has happened to them. God us called from death to life, from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and Satan to God.

Apply: How much do you know in your experience as a believer in Christ of these blessings?

God does not want his sons and daughters to feel weak and frustrated. He already has given you rich blessings in Christ and he wants them to be a vital part of your daily life. He does this by the work of the Holy Spirit, who takes what is Christ’s and makes it known to you. But don’t go astray! Don’t seek the blessings. Seek the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will find all your want and desire in him.