

Last week we looked at the opening verses of this letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians. The big headline of these verses is in verse 3. All Christians, that's all people who are members of God's family the church, all Christians have already been given every spiritual blessing. That's not some blessing, that's every blessing. There is no more blessing we could want, we already have it all.

Now, think about the last week. Can you say that you've felt like you have every spiritual blessing? Just thinking about my own week, I've had some great moments when I've delighted in what I have been given as a member of God's family. I had the great privilege of having dinner with the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of North America. It was wonderful to hear what God is doing through his church over in the states. And then on Thursday I got to spend the day with one of my heroes of the faith when he came for lunch. It was great to be reminded of what we have as brothers and sisters united in Christ.

But, it's fair to say, that for much of the rest of the week it didn't feel that I had been given every spiritual blessing. I'm quite tired, I've not slept all that well. I've felt frustration at much of what is going on in the world. Some days it feels more like a tough grind being a Christian rather than full of deep joy.

How about your week? Have you felt at every moment that you have been given every spiritual blessing? Has your life been one of fulfilment and security?

Now, what Paul wrote in verses 3-14 are objective truths. These are true for us, if we're a Christian, whether or not we understand them, feel them, believe them. Paul wrote those verses down as clear objective facts. But, did I always feel these were true for me? Did the reality of my true, eternal identity affect what I did at each and every moment? I'm not sure they did.

If you're not sure about these truths, if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, please do ask me about them after. Please ask each and every question you have. Don't let me off the hook. Grill me, find out if the claims made in the Bible actually stand up to intellectual rigour. Please don't think that by coming to church it's a matter of the blind leading the blind, an airy fairy, irrational existence. There is truth; test it. If you're not sure about these things do ask deep questions of theology and doctrine and faith.

But, for those of us who are Christians, we know our faith is so much more than simply a list of doctrinal statements. There is truth, and we can know it. But, we mustn't reduce the Christian life to the bare bones of a creed, it's so much more than that. God created us emotional, relational, thinking and feeling. And Paul knew this. So, Paul goes on, from verse 15, to pray that Ephesian Christians would know, understand, feel and believe all those amazing truths described in verses 3-14.

Last week we saw that Paul exhorted us to praise God because we have every spiritual blessing. He wanted to highlight the reality of the blessings that come from being part of God's church. But, he never wants to stop at the intellectual level. He wants these truths to transform our hearts.

So, in the passage we're looking at today, he prays they may know the fullness of this blessing. In essence verses 15-23 are a prayer report. Paul writes to tell them exactly what he prays for them. And, simply speaking, Paul prays they would know God better.

How does that compare to what we pray about? Are our prayers a shopping list of what is happening in our lives? A list of prayers which mirrors what I have on my to do list and in my diary. And, don't hear me wrong, we should pray about those things. The Bible tells us to pray about each and every situation we're in. But, if that's all we pray about I think we'll be falling far short of the Biblical model of prayer.

So as we look in these verses in more detail please consider your own prayer life. Hold a mirror up to what you pray about, and who you pray for, and see if it matches what Paul prays for here.

1. **Thank God for all the blessings we have (15-16)**

Paul starts verse 15 saying "For this reason". That's all those reasons he splurged out in verses 3-14. All those spiritual blessings that belong to each and every Christian. Because of all of those he gives thanks for these Ephesian Christians.

He knows their genuine, real Christians because, as he says, "Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people." The reality that they belong in God's family, the church, is shown by their faith and their love.

This is a faith with a specific object. It's not a generic faith in God. It's faith specifically in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's faith in all that Paul has listed about Christ in the 1st half of this chapter. You can't claim to have all those spiritual blessings unless you have faith in Jesus.

But, not only that, the genuineness of this faith is shown in their love for all God's people. Faith without actions isn't a genuine faith. You know your faith is real when it is shown by how you treat God's people. And in light of all that Paul has already said in Ephesians that makes sense. If you're a genuine Christian, you've been adopted into God's own family. You've become a real and eternal brother or sister with Jesus. AND a real and eternal sibling with all other Christians. If you belong in God's family, the church, you show that by loving the other members of your family.

It's like someone who says they're a fan of a particular football club. But, then you ask them if they know who the players are? What the results are? Do they spend time with other fans? Do other people know they're a fan? And if you find out the answer to all those questions is no. Well I think you can question whether they're really a fan at all.

Likewise, with the Christian faith. If someone doesn't want to know more about Jesus. If they don't want to spend time with other Christians. If their expressed faith in Christ makes limited visible difference to their lives I think you could question whether they're a Christian at all.

But, that wasn't the case with these guys from Ephesus. Paul had heard they were genuine Christians, therefore Paul knew that these spiritual blessings belonged to them. It's a simple maths equation, $1 + 1 = 2$. You're a Christian you automatically have every spiritual blessing. So, Paul never stopped giving thanks for them. What he'd heard about them made him rejoice and thank God.

I can relate to this. When I hear about someone becoming a Christian it feels me with joy. I'm thrilled. I heard this week about Rwanda and how many, many people are becoming Christians. It was wonderful to hear this. I heard about new churches being planted and growing in North America, that's amazing.

As we hear about God bringing new people into his family. As we hear about new brothers and sisters coming to faith and therefore sharing these spiritual blessings with us we should give thanks to God. Thanks for all he is and all he does in bringing people into an eternal and glorious relationship with him.

So, Paul thanks God for the objective reality that these Christians have every spiritual blessing in Christ. But, he doesn't leave it there. He wants them to experience, to know, to understand, to feel the subjective joy of these objective truths.

2. Ask God that we'd know him better (17-19a)

Look at Paul's prayer in verse 17. "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." Paul asks that God the Father would give them God the Holy Spirit so that they'd know God better.

Paul doesn't ask God to give them health, wealth and happiness. I think this prayer reveals what Paul most wants for this Christians. He wants them to know God better. To know God better is to understand his character, it's to understand what he does, it's to appreciate his magnificence, magnitude and majesty. God is so vast, and so beyond our comprehension, that we need God to help us to see and know him. So, Paul prays that God the Holy Spirit, who is wisdom and revelation, would be given to them.

That's a great description of the Holy Spirit. True wisdom is to know God. It's to understand truth. It's to recognise the difference between right and wrong. And revelation is understanding something. If you're in a dark room you need someone to switch the light on, then you can see what is there. What is there is revealed to you. We need God to switch our eyes on to see him, to know him better. That's exactly what the Holy Spirit does for us.

And Paul gets much more specific about exactly how they'll know God better. Look at verse 18. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." I love the phrase, the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, it's way beyond an intellectual comprehension, this is a much deeper knowledge. It's a mix of knowing something to be true and feeling it is true.

For example, factually I know the moon is a long way away, but I don't really understand how far that is. Whereas I know that Nicki loves me, and I feel it too. Paul is praying here for knowledge on a deep, personal level. It's not less than rational thought, it's so much more.

And this deep knowledge he prays they'll have is "that you may know the hope to which he has called you." Paul prays that they will have confidence in their true identity as part of God's family, the church. He wants them to deeply know, delight in, have assurance about where they truly belong.

This idea is expanded further in the next part of verse 18. "the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people." We expect this verse to say, the riches of our glorious inheritance as part of God's holy people. But, Paul wants them to know something much deeper and more significant. He wants them to that we are actually part of God's own inheritance. We are united with Christ; we belong with him. As we heard last week that means God looks at us as

holy and blameless. We are part of Jesus' family. We are part of his eternal kingdom. We are part of God's holy people.

Now, of course we're not part of this because we're special, or perfect. We're all sinners deserving eternal separation from God. There is nothing good in us that meant God chose us. But, even so, God has chosen us to be his inheritance. Paul prays these Ephesian Christian would really know and understand this.

And the final clause of his prayer report is that they would understand how this is possible. He wants them to know how they can have such confidence that this eternal identity really is theirs. Look at the start of verse 19. "His incomparably great power for us who believe."

If I say I'm going to arm wrestle Henry, my son. And I'm going to use all my strength against him. The result isn't in doubt. I will win. I am much stronger than he is. Admittedly in a few years that will change, but while I can I'll keep using this illustration! I say I will win, and my power means it will happen.

On a much, much bigger scale. God, whose power is incomparable, is working for us who believe. Paul prays they will know, really know, that this power of God is at work in them so they will know, really know, that they have been given every spiritual blessing.

How do our prayers for each other, and other Christians around the world, match up to Paul's prayer here? When we pray for our brothers and sisters who are facing violence, poverty, death for their faith. Do we solely pray for their material needs, or do we pray they will know God better?

What about those of us closer to home. Think about those in your home group. Those sitting next to you now. What do you pray for them? Does it match what Paul prays here for these Ephesian Christians?

And Paul finishes this section by reminding them to have confidence that God's will achieve what he promises to do.

3. Have confidence in God's power at work for the church (19b-23)

We can prayer like this with confidence because God's power is at work to do this. And Paul then explains the sheer magnitude of this power. Look from 19b. "That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms." So this power, that raised a rotting corpse back to life, is the same power at work in us. It's the power that has raised Jesus to where he is right now. See verse 21. Above all authority. Above every name. So, no Queen, King, Emperor, President has a more significant name. That's true now, and forever. Jesus Christ is utterly supreme. Not just above, but FAR above.

That power, is the same power at work for us who believe. And why does Paul want to tell us about this power. Well firstly, as we've said, so that we know that our identity is secure. That our prayers will be answered. That we know we've been given every spiritual blessing. And secondly as he tells us in verse 22. "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church."

God used his mighty power to raise Jesus back to life. To make him his eternal King, the Christ, with all rule and authority over everything. God made all things under his feet. He is the head over everything. Why? The end of

verse 22. “For the church.” For us. For Christians. For all of God’s people. All of God’s plan for his Son. His life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension to heaven was for the sake of his family, the church.

The implications of what that means for us Paul spells out in the rest of the letter. But, for now, dwell on the truth that Jesus is supreme over all things, but he is supreme over the church in a special way, a personal way. The church is his body. He is head over us in a special way. We are part of him, we are united with him. We are his body.

Our true identity is so completely wrapped up in Jesus Christ. Look at verse 23 and see how Paul describes it. “The church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Paul prays they will know God better. But, he doesn’t leave it as an airy fairy, that sounds nice kind of prayer. Paul reports the content of his prayer so they’ll know how they’ll know God better.

Do we pray that we’ll know God this way? God is too big for us to find on our own. We need him to give us his Spirit of wisdom and revelation. We need him to open the eyes of our hearts. Pray that he will give you that. Pray for yourself, pray that for others here, and pray it for Christians you know around the world.

Pray that you will take to heart all that God has graciously and powerfully done through Christ on our behalf; on behalf of the church.

Let’s Pray!

Highlight some of the books on prayer – esp “A call to spiritual reformation”