



THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY 2 CEASELESSLY PRAYING FOR YOU

Ephesians 1:15-23

After praising God for the salvation enjoyed by the Ephesian Christians (1:3-14), Paul now prays for them. His prayer takes up four matters. First he thanks God for their faith and love; second he prays that God will spiritually bless them; third he praises God for his power made present in the life of the believer, and finally his attention moves to Christ reigning in heaven.

Read the passage aloud.

Verses 15-16: Paul thanks God for the Ephesian Christian's faith and love. Paul first mentions how he has heard of the faith and love of the Ephesian Christians. For this he gives thanks in prayer. Paul was a great encourager. As he begins to pray for them he first mentions something very positive.

Q. 1. How do you encourage other Christians such as your pastor, church leaders and friends? Share a memory of when a church leader or Christian friend encouraged you.

In verse 16 Paul characterises his prayer for the Ephesian Christians as constant and continuing. He does not cease praying for them.

Q. 2. Many Christians go on praying week after week, month after month, sometimes year after year, for someone, possibly a loved family member. Do you think repetitive prayer is acceptable to God?

Verses 17-19: Paul now prays that God will bless them spiritually, that is, through the Holy Spirit.

Q. 3. When you pray for other believers what do you ask for and say? Give some examples.

Paul asks that God may give them 'the Spirit of revelation and wisdom.' It seems he is speaking of gifts of the Holy Spirit. In most churches it seems people believe that God no longer personally reveals anything to individuals; and in some churches it seems as if God is literally 'speaking' to people all the time. What should we believe?

The Bible tells us that God can reveal his mind in many ways: a vision, a dream, an audible voice or by giving conviction that this is what he is 'saying'. When a believer shares what they believe God has laid on their heart this is 'prophecy'. Prophecy can have varied content, prediction,

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warning, guidance, application of scripture, encouragement, etc. When the revelation comes from God and is spoken, the recipient(s) sense God is speaking; when it does not come from God it does not resonate with them. The recipient(s) do not hear God speaking to them. Sermons are not prophecy. They are usually teaching and exhortation. However, many a sermon has prophetic content. Sometimes the preacher may sense that what he/she is saying is what God wants to be said to those addressed. When such words come from God people hear God speaking to them.

Some think the gift of wisdom (see 1 Cor. 12:8) refers to God-given insight, often disclosed to a counsellor. This could be so but in the Old Testament wisdom most commonly refers to practical knowledge, or the ability to choose right conduct. A wise person knows God and does what is pleasing to God. This may well be what Paul thinks is this particular gift of the Spirit. The Pentecostal Pastor and scholar, Gordon Fee, commenting on the gift of wisdom mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:8 defines it as, the 'recognition that the message of Christ crucified is God's true wisdom.' (The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Eerdmans, 1987), p. 592).

Q. 4. Do you think that God still reveals his mind directly to believers today? Have we ever had a powerful sense that God was saying something to you personally? Can you give an example?

Q. 5. Paul says, all prophecies must be tested (1 Cor. 14:29, 1 Thess. 5:21 etc.). Why do you think all revelations shared with others should be evaluated, judged, tested? How can you test a prophecy, especially if it is not predictive of anything?

Verses 19-20a: The power of God is available to every believer. Having prayed that God will continue to work in the Ephesian Christian's lives Paul next gives an exuberant description of God's power.

Q. 6. How great is God's power and where was it most profoundly shown?

In verse 19 Paul says this power is available to 'us who believe'.

Q. 7. Do we know the reality of that power in our lives? If not why not? What testimony can you share from your own experience or from what you have read or heard about others who have experienced the power of God in their life?

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Verses 20b-23: Having spoken of the power God revealed in Christ's resurrection, Paul next speaks of the present glorious reign of Christ and of the church over which he reigns. Paul depicts the resurrected Jesus as now reigning supreme over all. He makes it clear that God the Father has put him completely in charge. Thus when we acknowledge Jesus Christ as the ruler of our life we are doing what the Bible suggests is right. However, we are not obeying Jesus as a second God, or one of three God's but the one God who now reigns. How the one God can be eternally three persons stretches our mind beyond limit but this is what the New Testament reveals. To be a Christian is not simply to believe in God. Many people believe in God. We Christians are those who believe in the God revealed in Jesus Christ and made present in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Q. 8. In what ways does knowing that Christ now rules supreme in heaven encourage us as we face the challenges of life on earth?

Verses 22-23: Paul says God the Father has made Christ 'head over all things for the church, which is his body.' This is his first mention of the church in Ephesians. In this epistle the church is the whole Christian community on earth, waiting for the day that Christ returns to perfect and unite past and present members of this community. This community in its present earthly form Paul says is 'the body of Christ'. Paul believed that the church in some way makes the risen Christ present on earth, it is his body, and the church is central to the outworking of God's great plan to transform the world through Christ.

Q. 10. We probably think of the church in the first instance as our congregation or as an institution which has its strengths and weaknesses. How did Paul think of the church and how different is it from the ways we often think of the church?

Q. 11. Do we sense that Christ is present in our congregation? How could you help your congregation to be more Christlike?

Q. 12. What have you learned from this passage? A number of people in the group may like to respond to this question.

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