Apostolic prayers

Paul's Prayer in Ephesians 1:17-20

1. Introduction

a. For years we have used the prayers of the Bible believing that the prayers that Jesus, Paul, and Peter prayed are recorded for our benefit. We refer to these prayers as the ***"apostolic prayers"*** because they are the prayers that Jesus prayed as our chief apostle (Heb. 3:1) and that the Spirit gave to the apostles.

b. Last time we considered why these prayers are so helpful and effective. Today we are going to look at the first of these prayers – the prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesian church at the beginning of his letter to them.

Eph.1:17-19 *[17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, [18] 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, [19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might*

c. Paul's one general prayer here is that the Father would give His people increased understanding of the knowledge of God so that they would experience three expressions of His glory.

   i To walk in confidence (hope) related to God's calling—His "assignment" for our life.

   ii To know who we are to God as His inheritance—how He sees us and feels about us.

   iii To experience God's power in our life—in our mind, heart, circumstances, and ministry.

d. In the preceding verses (Eph. 1:3-14) Paul had just outlined how the Father has "*blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"*. These verses give us one of the most comprehensive statements in the Bible describing how God lavishes grace upon His people. The Father chose His people to enjoy the exalted position of being His adopted children. We don't have time to look at these verses today but I encourage you to take time to study and meditate on these *"riches of the glory of grace"*.

e. Paul appealed to God as the *God of Jesus* and the *Father of glory*.

   i ***The God of our Lord Jesus Christ***: This includes what God did with Jesus in His humanity as the ideal picture of what the Father is committed to ultimately do with His redeemed people.

   ii ***The Father of glory***: The glory that the Father possesses is the very glory that He imparts to His people in salvation. He gives it to His people in this age *according to our hunger* for it.

f. Paul's primary prayer here is that God's people would know or encounter Him by receiving more of "*the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him"*: — that their "eyes of their understanding" (heart) be progressively enlightened by the Spirit (1:18).

   i The knowledge of God includes what God is like, how He acts and feels towards His people.

ii The unaided mind cannot understand spiritual truths—we need living understanding that only comes from the Spirit. The strongest eyes are useless when a person is in total darkness. The natural man has no spiritual sight. The Scripture is more than intellectual ideas, it is an unveiling of spiritual things which requires the supernatural capacities given by the Spirit.

1 Cor. 2:12-14 *[12] Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. [13] And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.[14] The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

g. The Greek word for *knowledge* (*epignosis*) refers to experiential knowledge which is much more than informational knowledge of true facts about God. To know or encounter God is the essence of eternal salvation Phil. 3:10).

John 17:3 *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only God and Jesus Christ.*

Phil.3:10…. *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*

h. Foundational to Paul's approach to discipleship is that "the heart of a believer be enlightened." It takes God to know God; thus, we earnestly pray for more. To Paul, this was the primary need for the Ephesian believers. It is the most powerful influence that equips us for wholeheartedness. Our prayer needs to be: "Lord, let me see what Paul saw, so that I can see and obey You like Paul did."

2. The hope of His calling

[17]…that the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him…[18]that you may know [by experience] what is the hope of His calling…

a. Paul's first specific request was that they have confidence related to God's calling for their lives— God's calling on our lives includes our calling to be in His eternal family (Eph. 1:3-14), but it also includes His divine assignment for our lives—in this age and the age-to-come. In other words, Paul prayed that people would receive living understanding about how God views their calling.

b. The divine assignment on our life has *two dimensions* (internal and external) in *two time frames* (temporal and eternal). We need revelation in these because by nature we have a wrong perspective. What God values and plans is often opposite of what we naturally value and plan. Only by revelation can we understand God's view.

c. God has a tailor-made calling or assignment for each person's life that includes both the present and future. This is one of the main emphases in Paul's prayer for believers.

Col. 1:9 *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,*

Col. 4:12 *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God*

d. ***Our internal calling***: Our primary calling in this age is internal. Our internal calling is to be a faithful disciple of Jesus that loves God and embraces what the world calls foolish (humility, serving, giving, praying, forgiving, etc.). The Sermon on the Mount lifestyle.

e. ***Our external calling*** *(in this age)*: This aspect of our divine assignment includes our position and function in our home, ministry, the marketplace etc. This is what most people are focused on when considering their "calling." This is an important part of our calling. However, it is the least important aspect of God's calling on our lives.

f. History testifies that the Lord has given the vast majority of people an assignment that involves "few things" and makes "very little" public impact as individuals (in terms of the numbers directly impacted).

Matt. 25:21 *His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.[a] You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'*

g. We can compare this life to a 70-year apprenticeship which prepares us for ministry in the age-to-come. It is important to understand that what we do in this age has continuity into the age-to-come. Our life is changed when we have assurance that the "small things" that we do in seeking to obey God are valuable to Him—He esteems and remembers them forever

Mt. 10:42 *And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

h. ***Our eternal calling*** *(starting in the Millennium)*: The impact or the measure of God's glory that the Spirit will release through us in the age to come will be much greater than it is in this age. It takes revelation to see that our greatest measure of power and ministry impact is in the age-to-come. By revelation we see that faithfulness in "little" now leads to "ruling ten cities" in the age-to-come.

3. The glory of being God's inheritance

[17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, [18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know ……. what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

a. Paul's second specific request relates to who we are to God**.** This prayer is that we would receive revelation that we are God's inheritance. To know who we are to God as His inheritance is to know how He sees and feels about us. By making us His inheritance, God has revealed His passion for us. Paul spoke of both our inheritance in God (Eph. 1:14) and of God's inheritance in us (Eph. 1:18).

Eph.1:14 ***…..****were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

b. Paul is making a reference to Moses' revelation from God

Deut. 32:9 *But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.*

c. The Father promised Jesus an inheritance. It is amazing that God who possesses all things has an inheritance for which He must wait. Jesus' inheritance is a people who are voluntary lovers of God. God will not force this on us but woos and wins us by His grace to respond freely to Him in love.

d. The great prize of all the ages that the Father has chosen to give Jesus is a Church filled with those who voluntarily choose to love Him. We are the reward that God gave to Jesus because we are what Jesus most desires. This reveals His passion for us and gives us great dignity. We are that which is nearest and dearest to His heart. We are the reward that Jesus longs for.

e. Seeing who we are to God is foundational to our spiritual identity—we are objects of His affection. We are transformed when we see the value, dignity, honor, and beauty that we possess in His eyes.

i We confess that we are Jesus' favorites in that He loves us as the Father loves Him.

John15:9 *As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you…*

ii We confess that the heart of Jesus, the Bridegroom King, is ravished for His Bride.

Song 4:9 *[9]You have ravished My heart, My sister, My Bride…*

iii We confess that Jesus' desire if for His people.

Song 7:10 *[10]I am my Beloved's and His desire is toward me.*

f. We can overcome passivity and discouragement by growing in revelation of who we are to Jesus.

4. Experiencing the greatness of God's power (Eph. 1:19)

[17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, [18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know …….. what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might

a. Paul's third specific request relates to experiencing the power of God and perceiving rightly how it operates in and through us. We must not despise the "small things" that the Lord does in and through our lives.

Zech. 4:10 *[10]For who has despised the day of small things?*

b. We need revelation to see how God has wisely chosen to release power in His Kingdom. God's way is usually to release His power in small measures—but it is still "His power." On many occasions the Spirit inspires our heart and uses us to bless others—in small measures but it is still "His power." When we see a small measures of God's power as true expressions of His glory, then we receive it with gratitude while being sustained in our hunger to contend for greater measures of power.

c. We must walk in the tension of being grateful and faithful in the days of small beginnings while contending to see a far greater measure of His power. We pray earnestly for an historic visitation of the Spirit while giving thanks for the smaller measure that we walk in today.

d. The greatest outpouring of the Spirit in history will occur in the end times, resulting in a Church filled with God's glory

Eph. 5:27 *so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*

e. The spirit of prophecy will be released in an unprecedented measure, resulting in a great ingathering of new believers from all nations

Matt. 24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

Rev. 7:9 *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,*

Acts 2:17-20 *17 "…in the last days…I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams…19 I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke…20 before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD."*

f. We need revelation of God's zeal to pour out His Spirit in this way—to have a sustained vision to contend for the full breakthrough of God's power in our lives, city, and nation.

5. Conclusion

a. In Paul's teaching to the New Testament church he was always aiming at the heart of the believer being enlightened because he knew that if that spark—those little moments of inspiration, just little instalments of inspiration—he knew that if that happens regularly then a young believer will become a mature disciple in time. If that was Paul's approach, that is our approach as we pray for ourselves and the church.

b. This apostolic prayer is the foundational prayer upon which all the others rest. Without a heart which is enlightened by the Spirit to receive and grow in the love of God all other prayers will not break into the human heart.

c. It is not the only thing we need, but without this the other things are not effective to move us to humility, love, and obedience when we are under pressure. When the pressure comes, we will go in the other direction. But when we have this revelation in our heart then we will persevere and run the race to the end.