

Ephesians (4) ~ 1:15-18

Welcome back to our series of studies in Ephesians. We're in chapter one but now we move into the second half. We want to explore what Paul is saying in verses 15-18. Next week, God willing, we'll unpack the final few verses in 19-23.

In the previous section, running from verses 3-14, Paul has been reminding us where we stand. We stand complete in Christ. He is all I need and all that I need is found in him.

Now he goes a step further and intimates the reason why we stand, where we stand. It's down to prayer. Prayer makes a world of difference because prayer makes all the difference in the world. Prayer is the baseline. It is the oil that keeps us running. When we pray, God works. In verses 15-16 it is a church centred prayer and in verses 17-23 it is a Christ centred prayer.

Here we see the great man on his knees. We don't often think of Paul as an outstanding man of prayer, but he was! We think of Moses as a mighty intercessor when he met God on top of the mountain. We think of David with his psalms of worship - and there are many psalms of lament where he poured out his heart to God. We think of Elijah who stood alone before an altar drenched with water at Mount Carmel. There is Nehemiah whose journal is punctuated with prayer. Then there was Daniel who opened his window toward Jerusalem and prayed three times a day, even though he lived and worked in a hostile, secular environment.

When it comes to storming the gates of heaven, Paul was a great man of prayer as well. He was up there with the best. Today, it's the fly on the wall syndrome, we eavesdrop; we hear all that he has to say.

So why does he pray? What drives him to his knees? There are two main factors in verse 15. He talks about *their faith and their love*. For me, that's a delightful combination.

Sometimes when Paul pens an epistle he warmly commended the believers for their faith as in Romans 1:8. Other times, he picked up the quill and, writing on the parchment, he drew attention to three influences which he believed are most important in any church, the trio of faith, hope and love as in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and Colossians 1:4-5.

Here, in Ephesians, he breaks the mould and mentions two – *faith and love*. Their faith reached upward and their love reached outward. One was toward the Lord ... and the other was toward the people of God.

In faith they were trusting the Saviour. Paul spent the best part of three years there and he knew many of the Christians by name. They were buddies. He was their father in the Lord for he had personally led many of them to saving faith in Christ.

But, even when he is gone, the move of God's Spirit is continuing. The preaching of the Word is being blessed, people are responding to Jesus, these are the ones he is talking about in verse 15.

The news about them is heart warming. It sends a shiver down his spine.

Paul's in prison so he can't pay them a pastoral visit, but he can write to them, and he can certainly pray for them. His prison cell becomes a prayer cell. We are never out of work when it comes to serving the Lord Jesus. It seems to me that the devil had as much reason to fear Paul's prayers as he had to fear his preaching and his pen.

And from this verse we also glean that they treated each other with love. Most of us find it fairly easy to love some of the Lord's people, some of the time, but it's not so easy to love all of the Lord's people, all of the time. That's a tough one, isn't it. In situations like that, in your church and mine, we are relationally challenged. That said, they bucked the trend in Ephesus!

Their love wasn't just a sticker on the back window of their car. It was real. They wore it on their sleeve. It was the badge on the lapel of their lives.

This love is not confined to those we like, or those who like us, or even those we would like to like us. It's not selective. He doesn't have the clique mentality. Yes, we can love the lovely, we can love the loveable, and we can love the loving. But their love embraced every member of the family. Think about it: how do we love those who hold to a different doctrinal position to ours? How do we love those in God's family who disagree with us? How do we love those whose temperament is the opposite of ours? How do we love those whose culture clashes with ours, those who have a

different mindset to ours, those with a different set of values to ones we hold dear? The question is: How do we love them?

I can imagine it was relatively easy for Paul to love young Timothy, he was his son in the faith, his most ardent admirer, his most loyal helper, and soon to be his chosen successor.

And, I suppose, he had no trouble loving Dr Luke – he was his personal physician; he had done him many favours as they trekked around the country. It probably wouldn't have been too difficult for him to love Peter even though there were times he irritated him. Remember the day they had an eyeball to eyeball confrontation. Yet there was so much about Peter that was so loveable, he was impulsive, but he had a big soft heart.

What about James? A different ball game. Not the easiest kind of person to love. He was stern, ascetic, legalistic and narrow minded. A pillar in the early church, yes, but not the kind of person you could get close to.

Paul loved the Lord's people with an *agape* kind of love. This is John 3:16 love. And his love was infectious. The believers at Ephesus caught it and so had their converts. It must have been a super fellowship. In spite of the people who were there and the problems they wrestled with, there was a love overflowing in their midst. That's always the acid test.

I think of the words penned by John in his epistle: *we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.*

Well, that's what they had. Faith toward God and love toward men. And, try if you will, you can't separate the two.

So how does he pray for them? Is it now and again? No, for in verse 16 we read that he has not stopped giving thanks for them as he has remembered them in prayer. It was constant. He was always at it. Stickability in prayer!

There was praise mingled with prayer. He says, 'thanks Lord' for them. There was obviously a time when he started praying for them, but the fact is, he hasn't stopped. They mean so much to him. He frequently thanks God for them and for the joy they brought to his heart.

He writes and tells them that he feels the way he does – that's the horizontal component. But, his praise is directed heavenward – that's the vertical constituent. Yes, they would be uplifted and God would be exalted.

I'm sure that must have boosted their morale and really blessed them. The time to give flowers is when people are alive, not dead. And so he turns to them and says: thanks for the privilege of being with you; and he turns to God and says: thanks, Lord, for letting me be there.

His opening phrase in verse 17 is choice and it says more than words can possibly tell. He tells the truth by saying, *'I keep asking.'* Here is a man who never gives up, he doesn't know what it is to give in or call it quits.

But when he spends time in prayer on their behalf, what does he pray for? Take a look at verses 17-23.

Number one, he wants them to know more of the attributes of Christ in verse 17. Number two, he wants them to know more of the achievements of Christ in verse 18. Number three, he wants them to know more of the ability of Christ in verses 19-21. And, number four, he wants them to know more of the ascendancy of Christ in verses 22-23.

That's not the way we pray! Other matters loom large in our prayers. Better health. More money. Ideal job conditions. Family problems. World crises. And, yet, in none of Paul's prison prayers does he request anything of a material nature. There's nothing wrong with praying for all these other things, they're legitimate, but the emphasis here is on spiritual perception and real Christian character.

He doesn't ask God to give them what they don't have; rather, he prays that God will reveal to them what they already have. Paul prayed with passion that people might know God better and become better acquainted with Jesus.

He wants them to have an appreciation of who they are in Christ and then to appropriate the resources available to them. They can begin to answer their own prayers as they personalise all that they have in the Lord.

You see, it's only when we understand how our lives are anchored in eternity that we have the right motivation for living in time. Maybe we need to pray – Lord, I want to know you more and more.

In his first petition in verse 17 he longs that they might know more of the person of Christ. It's interesting to note that he directs his prayer to the

'God of our Lord Jesus Christ' – what a lovely phrase that is.

When you go up the chapter to verse 3 he refers to Him there as the *'Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.'* Why the difference? It's a reminder to us that Jesus became such a real human being that God was his God just as much as he is ours.

That means, it is only through the Lord Jesus that this God can be fully known and approached.

Jesus is the only one who has spanned the gap between God and man. He has bridged the gulf.

He also sees him as the *'glorious Father'* – what a marvellous title that is. It can be translated to read *'the Father of glory.'* Remember, Jesus is spoken of as the *'Lord of glory'* in 1 Corinthians 2:8. Then, in the following couple of verses, the Holy Spirit is described as the revealer of glory. So, when it comes to glory, it's all neatly wrapped up in the Trinity.

There you find the origin of glory, the source of glory and the king of glory. And, because of that, he is the one to whom all glory belongs.

O yes, we can know about God. And that's really good. But, says the apostle, we can know God.

And, that's even better. We can know him in the glory of his person, we can know him in the glory of his personality as he reveals himself to us.

You will realise that he has revealed himself in two ways. Number one, in the inspired word. And, number two, in the incarnate word. He has said what he is like in the one, and he has shown what he is like in the other.

The key question is, how do we get to know him better? The answer is straightforward: get to

know the scriptures for the more you are familiar with them the more you will know the Saviour. In a sense, that should not surprise us, for we find Christ in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). There's no greater or grander occupation for the people of God.

I encourage each one of you to make this your personal goal and go for it. Get to know the Lord. Don't be content with what you know of him today, there's so much more to learn. Don't be satisfied with where you are spiritually at this moment, there's more land to claim.

Our experience of God is a deepening one, we should be growing and developing. It's going from strength to strength. It's about intimacy. It's simply getting to know God better.

That's why he prays that we might have the 'Spirit of wisdom and revelation' – they're the tools of the trade. It has nothing to do with our education, or our level of intelligence. No matter how clever we are, unless the Holy Spirit gives us understanding, our hearts will remain darkened.

We need the light which comes when he shines within. No wonder Paul prayed the way he did.

The atheist says, there is no God for us to know; the agnostic says, if there is a God we cannot know him; we know there is a God, we have met him, and in the Lord Jesus, we know him.

We can look at it like this: to know God personally, that's salvation. To know God increasingly, that's sanctification. To know God perfectly, that's glorification. Ah, the better we know God, the better we know ourselves and the better we know each other!

It is not enough to know God only as Saviour. We must get to know him as our heavenly Father, as our faithful friend, as our trusted guide ... and the better we know him, the more satisfying and enthralling our relationship with him will be.

Can you say along with the chorus: The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you!

Then when he comes to verse 18 he prays for them to know more of the portion of Christ. He prays that the Lord would open our eyes, that our vision would not be blurred. Why? It's too good to miss! Our hope is in the Lord.

He says *'that we may know the hope to which he has called you.'* There are two thoughts here – one, we have a hope and, two, we have been called. Our calling is down to the eternal purposes of God. We have not merely hitched our wagon to a star. It is in him. We are the objects of his attention and affection. He is interested in us now and in our ultimate destiny. We have been called. Paul never tired of testifying that *God called him by his grace*, see Galatians 1:15. He reminded Timothy that ours is *a holy calling* – that's in 2 Timothy 1:9. Peter says *we have been called out of darkness into his marvellous light* (1 Peter 2:9). And in his second epistle, Peter goes on to say that we have been *called to glory* (1:3).

The old hymn, penned by Charles Gabriel, put it well when it said: He called me long before I heard, before my sinful heart was stirred, but when I took him at his word, forgiven he lifted me. Now, because we have been called, we have a wonderful hope. Paul wants us to be occupied with thoughts about our hope in Christ. They help

us put the mundane things of time and sense into perspective. We see events in our lives through a different lens. What is the hope?

It's not a hope so kind of hope, there's nothing vague about it; it's an assurance for the future. The hope we have is that one day we shall see Jesus, the king in all his beauty ... that one day we will be with the Lord and that's far better ... that one day he will return and that for us is a glorious and blessed hope.

When we were lost we were a people without hope. But when we came to Jesus he gave us a living hope. That's hope with a capital H. That's what keeps us going when the burdens are heavy and the battle is hard. It will put a twinkle in your eye, it will add a metre to your every step, it will put the sparkle back into our jaded lives. Yes, thank God, when we know him we have a hope!

That's not the end of the story. For here again in verse 18 we discover another wonderful fact. It is that his heritage is in us. Did you see what it says: it speaks of *'the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.'*

This is not the same as what's in verse 11. There we have an inheritance in him. Here, seven verses later, we find that his inheritance is in us. That is breathtaking.

God looks upon us as an asset, we are part of his phenomenal wealth, we are the dividend from his investment at Calvary. This reminds us that God gets something out of our salvation as well. I find that quite incredible.

What we get is him, and that defies description – what he gets is us, and that transcends

comprehension. A poor bargain for him, it would seem. But think about it for a minute – it's maybe not as bad as it looks on the surface. In his wisdom and grace, he obviously thought we were worth saving, we are, after all, a bride for his son and it's all because of love.

We note the fact of his inheritance. It's in the saints. He has no inheritance in the sinner. His redemptive work gives us our value and it's all because of his precious blood.

We also see the fame, the aura, of his inheritance. There is a glory associated with it, and a gloriousness attached to it. It is the endless theme of seraph song for the angels sing about it day and night. It is the wonder of all wonders in a land of hope and glory.

We are also made aware of the fullness of his inheritance. He talked about the riches of it. That implies we are a source of untold wealth on the balance sheet of heaven. We matter to him in a way that is beyond our comprehension.

We are the brightest jewels in his crown. Great, isn't it. I can't explain it but I know it's true. And so I just rejoice in it.

There's another lovely thought which is linked with this particular truth. Here it is: God deals with us on the basis of our future, not on the basis of our past. A couple of examples are Gideon and Simon Peter!

You get the message: we live our lives in the future tense. Our lives should be controlled by what we shall be when Jesus returns. And the more we get to know him, the better it becomes.

Can you say: "Lord, it's great to know you, but I want to know you better?"