6-17-18

Ephesians 1:15-19a

Last week we looked at the first couple of these verses. There were two things that Paul found tremendously important that were taking place in the church: They had faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and they loved the saints, their brothers and sisters in Christ. We can apply this to ourselves. Our most important actions as a church body are faith in Jesus and love for the rest of the body of Christ. Now, these two things take in lots of different actions and involve a Christian view of how to live our lives, but faith and love give us a foundation to build on.

We saw that Paul prayed for them with both thanksgiving and with intercession. These are lessons for us to follow. We need to thank God for each person here. He is the One who brings people into His church in order to build it in the way He wants it. So, we ought to be thankful to Him for each building block that is here; for each special part of His body gathered here to bring Him glory.

And so, we need to intercede for each other and for this church. Prayer is the way that God has ordained to accomplish His purposes. He has chosen that by our prayers for His will to be done, it is done. Pray for each other’s physical needs, but do not neglect praying for each other’s spiritual needs. Ultimately, the spiritual are far more important than the physical because the spiritual are eternal.

Paul continues his prayer, and by his prayer, we learn what we need to pray. As we have seen, Paul prays for the saints to have a spirit of wisdom and of revelation of the knowledge of God. When Paul says “spirit” here, he is referring to the Holy Spirit. The giving of wisdom and revelation are both activities of the Holy Spirit. As we pointed out earlier, we as Christians, already have the Holy Spirit and we already have all the spiritual blessings which include wisdom and revelation.

The Gospel itself can only be understood if the Holy Spirit gives the wisdom and revelation to receive it. In fact, we need to be careful when we consider non-believers. It seems absurd to us that someone would not accept Christ. But we must remember that the decision for Jesus is a spiritual one, not one of the flesh. It is God’s desire that no one should perish, therefore, our calling is to pray for non-believers. Again, God has ordained that by our prayers according to His will, His will is done.

I have digressed here because Paul is speaking of believers. For believers, we pray that the Holy Spirit would work more strongly in their lives. We pray that the blessings that have already been received would be revealed and strengthened to be used for the glory of God. These things combine to create an increased knowledge of God, as revealed through Jesus Christ. As Jesus said in His high priestly prayer:

John 17:3

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Our eternal life is dependent on knowledge of God and Jesus. It is not simply “knowing of”, but a true personal knowledge of Them. To know Jesus, is to know the Gospel, and to accept the Gospel means we have been given knowledge of Christ. What we need now, is to know Him more so that we may become more like Him. Ask for yourself, and intercede for your brothers and sisters in Christ, that a deeper knowledge of Jesus be given, and that our relationship with Him would grow stronger.

Starting with verse 18, Paul expands on what he has written; what he is praying for on behalf of his readers. He prays that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened. In our culture, we tend to think of the heart as the seat of emotion. We think of it in terms of love or excitement or happiness. When we read of the heart in the Bible, we must take that culture into account. The heart was not only the center of emotion, but also of the mind. Referring to the heart meant the whole inward self.

Recall what the Bible tells us about the heart of mankind when they are apart from Christ or choose to reject Him. It repeatedly tells us that the heart tends to evil and that spiritual blindness is the normal state of people.

Romans 1:21

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

In a state of darkness, one cannot see. Additionally, darkness indicates evil which flees from the light. Many people understand that God exists simply from His creation, but they choose to ignore Him and go on their own rebellious way. These are the people who are spiritually blind, the eyes of their hearts are not open.

Now, we who have accepted the Gospel of Jesus Christ have had our eyes open, the eyes of our hearts; that is, our spiritual eyes. In Luke 4:18, Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah and applied the words to Himself:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed.”

Later in Luke 7:21, there is an account of something that Jesus did frequently:

At that very time He cured many *people* of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many *who were* blind.

What was revealed in prophecy and what Jesus did in the physical are to show us what Jesus would actually accomplish in the spiritual. He would enlighten hearts to understand the Gospel, He would open the eyes of hearts to see Him and His Father so that salvation could be achieved. Now Paul prays for believers to have the eyes of their hearts open even wider to see more of Almighty God; to understand even more about Him and His plan for salvation.

Paul prays that the enlightenment would lead to three things. 1) Knowing the hope of His calling; 2) Knowing the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; and 3) Knowing the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. All these things come to us by the Holy Spirit through the process of sanctification. We do what we can to sanctify ourselves and depend on the Holy Spirit for the results. It is a lifelong process, so don’t become frustrated if it seems to be taking too long.

Let’s look at the hope of His calling. Next week, we will consider the other two. First off, notice that it is the hope of *His* calling, that is, God’s. Remember that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God calls us, He seeks us out. He even sends His Holy Spirit to prepare our hearts and give us the faith to receive Jesus for salvation. What a comfort this is to us, that it is God who initiates our relationship with Him; He wants us to turn to Him. Because our hope is based on God, it is a sure hope that we can depend on; not just something that may or may not happen by chance.

So what all do we hope for since He has called us? The answers come throughout the New Testament. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 we read; But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. Foremost, we hope in salvation. Without salvation, we are destined to face eternity in hell, paying the price for our own sins. It does us good to think on this sometimes to realize the gravity of our own evil and to cause us to have gratitude for what Jesus did for us.

Galatians 5:5 reads: For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. We cannot earn our own righteousness and we must be righteous to be present with God. By Christ’s work on the cross, His perfect righteousness has been imparted to us. Even though our actions are still unrighteous in this life, we look forward to being perfectly righteous before God one day. Righteousness is one of those things we have now, but not yet. We must continue to hope in the promised righteousness to come.

1 Corinthians 15:52 tells us: in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. This is our hope of resurrection; of resurrection in a wonderful new body that will be like Christ’s. This body will be perfect, everlasting, and never subject to the effects of sin. This is how we will exist for eternity in perfect fellowship with God the Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We have the specific promise of eternal life mentioned in Titus 1:2: in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago. We were meant to have eternal life, that was God’s original design. Think back to the garden in Genesis; there were two trees. Remember that one of them was called the tree of life. That tree never went away and it is Jesus Christ. In Him, we look forward to eternal life.

Romans 5:1-2 we have a hope which is the fruit of all the other hopes we have in God through Jesus: Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. As the Holy Spirit unfolds for us all the mighty and marvelous things God has done on our behalf, we develop a desire for God to be glorified. In this process we give our lives more and more to God, to be used according to His will, in order that He receive glory. Here we end up back at the basic elements Paul spoke to the Ephesians about: Faith in Jesus and love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. By these things we show God’s glory.

And what about His calling itself? What are we called to? 1 Corinthians 1:9: God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We are called to fellowship with the King of all, with God Himself. This fellowship is not some formal association that is stiff and unfriendly. It will be more intimate than any relationship you have ever experienced. More than husband and wife, more than your closest friend, more than parent and child. Again, how comforting; God has called *us* to this relationship.

Another calling is to be holy, 1 Peter 1:15-16 tells us to be holy and backs it up from the book of Leviticus: but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Here again, we have our work to do by practicing holy living because that is what God called us to do. But God knows our weakness, so we are ultimately made holy by the work of His Son, Jesus.

There are certainly other examples of our hopes and what we are called to in God’s word. But all these things tie back into something Paul said back in verse 10 of Ephesians. He told us that God has the view to sum up all things in Christ. Even though all these things work out for our benefit, the ultimate purpose is to put everything under His Son’s Lordship. For this reason, sometimes we are also called to suffer. But it is our desire to bring Christ glory and we know that the time will come when God will wipe away every tear.

Prayer

Yahweh, we worship You and praise You and thank You. By Your grace we have saving faith, and Jesus in which to place that faith. Not only do You provide salvation, but You call us to receive it. It is a strong hope for us, because it is promised by You.

Thank You for teaching us to pray in Your word. Thank You for the Holy Spirit and all the spiritual blessings You have given us. We humbly ask for a stronger leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and to know the blessings that You have for us. Guide us in using these things for Your Kingdom and uplifting Your body of believers.

We also pray for this church and all Your church throughout the world. Open the eyes of our hearts by providing wisdom and revelation. Sanctity us; help us to follow Your calling and cling to the hope You have for us.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen