6-10-18

Ephesians 1:15-23

The first chapter of Ephesians is full of teaching and explaining wonderful things about God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But it is also a prayer. The first half of the chapter, which we have covered, is praising God for who He is and for all the wonderful things He has provided for those of us who are His children. The second half of the chapter is a prayer for the recipients of the letter. It is a prayer to strengthen all those blessings that God has already bestowed.

I want to bring back to mind some of the things we have already covered in our studies so far. Paul blesses God the Father, in other words, gives Him praise. He is the source of all the blessings we receive. All these blessings are strictly through grace. None of us are good enough to stand before God, none of us deserve any good thing from Him. Grace is that undeserved favor that is part of God’s character. He gives us the chance for salvation, He gives us the faith to accept that salvation, and then He opens the floodgates of heaven to pour even more blessings on us.

God the Father has chosen to make all these things available through God the Son, Jesus Christ. We can’t have any of these blessings without accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour; and then they come through Him. Our salvation is through Jesus and through Him alone. There is no bypassing Jesus and going directly to the Father; this is the way that the sovereign Father has ordained it. As Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” In addition to salvation, all the blessings of God are brought to us through Jesus as Paul tells us in verse 3. “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* **in Christ**”.

God the Father has chosen to make all these blessing active through God the Holy Spirit. Even the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to us through Jesus. Notice that it said in verse 3 that the blessings we are given are spiritual; these blessings are active and thrive in us by the work of the Holy Spirit. In addition, as we are told in verse 13, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit Himself. Once sealed, we belong to God and no one can snatch us out of His hand.

The Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are again presented in the second half of this chapter. In verse 17, Paul prays that “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.” So, in this prayer, Paul praises the Trinity and then requests the Trinity’s action on behalf of his readers.

This is a good example for us to follow. Giving glory to God is very important and we must not neglect it in our private prayers. The main reason for doing this is because He deserves it. He is God; the Almighty; the creator of the universe and all things in it. He is glorious. All the theophanies, or physical appearances of God, involve some combination of thunder and lightning, fire, smoke, clouds, earthquake or wonderous bright light. All the visions of God involve powerful beings giving Him glory, a beautiful throne bearing precious jewels and gold; again, fire, smoke, thunder, lightning; brilliant light that can be too bright to look upon.

The second part of Paul’s prayer is intersession for the believers. Notice how he focuses on the spiritual aspect in his requests for them. We often focus on the physical when we offer intercessory prayers. We pray for healing, for well-being, for earthly success. And all these prayers are good. We live on this earth and in this world. We need God’s provision to survive and He is pleased to see His children prosper.

What Paul reminds us of here in his prayer, is that we must not forget intercession for spiritual well-being, which in reality, is far more important than the physical. Many of us pray for those who are unsaved; we pray that they would come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ and accept Him as Saviour. This, too, is a good and acceptable prayer. What we mustn’t forget, is to pray for the spiritual health and growth of our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is easy to forget this because they are saved. But our spiritual growth as Christians is part of our sanctification; it brings us closer to being like Jesus, which is what we should strive for in this life.

Paul’s specific prayer in verse 17 is for “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.” This is a reference to some of the work of the Holy Spirit. The giving of wisdom and revelation or knowledge are two of His primary attributes. Notice that Paul doesn’t ask for the specific blessings that are brought about from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. Why? We already have them. Look back to verse 3: Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ. We are told that God *has* blessed us. He has already given us every spiritual blessing.

So, why don’t all these blessings manifest themselves in our lives? Because our sanctification has not yet been fulfilled. Sanctification is one of those interesting elements of the Christian life that we can say is “now, but not yet”. Basically, sanctification is we as Christians, becoming more like Christ, which, of course, includes sinning less.

Sanctification does take place when we accept Jesus Christ as Saviour. It is a cleansing, it is a change in our moral outlook on life. One of the places we read of this first step is in:

1 Corinthians 6:11

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

See how it is in the past tense “you were sanctified”. It is something that has already happened. When the time comes to leave this earth, you will be ready; salvation is yours. In addition, all the spiritual blessings Paul speaks of in Ephesians are yours.

Now, when we usually speak of sanctification, we speak of something that is (hopefully) taking place throughout our lives.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

That scripture tells us that we are being transformed into the image of Christ, progressing from one degree of glory to another. This is a process we are in for the rest of our lives. In this life, we don’t reach this goal, but it is pleasing to God for us to progress. The Holy Spirit ultimately does the work, but cooperation is required from us.

Romans 6:19

For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

The New Testament has many exhortations on how we are to behave as servants of Christ. Following these commands does not carry the idea of salvation, but on becoming more like Jesus and therefore being pleasing to God. The sanctification process involves the manifestation of the spiritual blessings we have received from God. This is why Paul prays for wisdom and revelation from the Holy Spirit for his readers. We need wisdom to use the blessings we already possess. We also need revelation in order to understand these blessings. Reading our Bibles is important for discovering what God has for us, but the Bible is a supernatural book; we require supernatural help to understand it. That help is what Paul is praying for.

Our sanctification will be complete when our life on this earth is done. This is something wonderful we have to look forward to. When we die, because we are saved, our soul enters heaven and nothing that is sinful can enter heaven. The author of the book of Hebrews gives a list of those who will be in the Holy City of God in chapter 12; and in verse 23 he mentions, “the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect”. The sanctification of our souls is completed upon our death. The next step is our body.

1 John 3:2

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

This is when we will receive our glorified bodies, at the resurrection. This is when we will be complete, this is when we will be like Christ. We will understand all our spiritual blessings that God has bestowed on us. Come, Lord Jesus!

So many times, we as Christians, make the mistake of asking for the Holy Spirit; we already have Him. In addition, we make the mistake of asking for spiritual blessings; again, we already have them. Instead, thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and for the spiritual blessings that He has poured out on us. After thanking Him, ask for a more powerful presence of the Holy Spirit and a stronger working of His in your life. Ask for the Holy Spirit to give you revelation so that you may recognize the spiritual blessings you have. Ask for wisdom from God so these blessings may be properly used; to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ and to bring souls into His Kingdom.

Also, intercede for your fellow Christians. Pray that the Holy Spirit work powerfully in bringing about sanctification and pray that blessings are understood and used for Christ.

Think about what Paul is saying in verses 15 and 16:

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers

The Ephesian church is doing things right. Reports of them have reached Paul, who at this time was a prisoner in Rome. Their faith in Jesus is very strong. They are loving one another as Jesus had commanded. Certainly, Paul gives thanks to God for them because this is an obvious work of the Holy Spirit. But notice that Paul is still praying for them, especially in the way we have just discussed.

I think that so often, when things are going well for someone or for a church, we don’t pray for them. We must follow Paul’s example here and continue to pray on their behalf. Intercessory pray in these cases accomplishes two things. First, it can bring about even more fruit for God than is already being produced. Second, they need protection. You can bet that any Christian or church who is doing much for the Kingdom of God will attract the attacks of satan. This will be a spiritual attack and so, requires the spiritual weapon of prayer.

Prayer is so important in the Christian life. It is the way that God has ordained to make things happen, both in the physical and in the spiritual. Give Him praise, make requests, intercede for others; be sure to include the spiritual with the physical.

Prayer

Lord God, it is with deep gratitude that we come before You. Your mercy and grace are beyond our comprehension. It is only because of Your great love that we have a means of salvation; Your Son, Jesus Christ.

You graciously pour more blessings upon us than we can discern in this lifetime. But by Your Holy Spirit, we will make use of some of them for our own sanctification, for giving You glory, and for building Your Kingdom by winning souls for You.

May Your Holy Spirit reveal to each of us Your will, for ourselves and for Your church. Then give us the strength to carry out those actions that are pleasing to You. Help us to abide in faith in Jesus and in love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen