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Ephesians 1:15

We're continuing our study of the book of Ephesians this morning. We'll be picking up in Ephesians 1:15 where Paul begins to describe how and why He is praying for the church.

Lets just start by reading verses 15 through the first part of 18, and then we'll go back and look more carefully at what is written.

Eph 1:15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, **Eph 1:16** do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: **Eph 1:17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, **Eph 1:18** the eyes of your understanding being enlightened;

Before we even get into today's verses, I want to first point out how naturally this prayer flows out from what we just read in the previous verses of Ephesians chapter 1. It makes perfect sense if you see the reality and order of what Paul is saying here. It is amazing to me how clear this becomes when you understand that He is always describing a finished work of God in Christ that must be revealed and apprehended through the work of the Spirit.

That is exactly what Ephesians chapter 1 presents us with. First you have Paul describing the finished work of God in Christ. Remember...verse 3 – in Him we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. Verse 5 - In Him we have the adoption, the son-placement that has been promised. Verse 7 – In Him we have the redemption. Verse 9 – in Him we have the mystery revealed and made known. Verse 10 – in Him we have come to the administration of the fullness of time where all things have been gathered up, summed up in Him. Verse 11 – In Him we also have obtained the inheritance. We looked at all of this in some detail in weeks past.

And then last time, two weeks ago, we looked at verses 12 -14. And there we saw that the very thing Paul had specifically told them had been given to them in Christ, must become a reality, an experience, and a possession of the soul through the Spirit of promise. I want you to take note of the order here. First you have the finished work. Then you have the promise of what the Spirit does in the believer. Then you have, in our verses this week, the prayer of Paul that the Spirit would do exactly that. The flow of His thought makes perfect sense.

So in verses 12 – 14 you have the Spirit described as the guarantee that we have received an inheritance will know that inheritance. We who have been redeemed, will know and experience that redemption. Its one thing to be finished in Christ. Its another thing for what is finished in Christ to be finished in your heart – the first having been put away, the second having been established.

And so what we have here is what we find all over the New Testament. **We have first of all the finished work of the cross. And second of all the work of the Spirit of God to make what God has finished an actual experience and possession of your soul, and not just a chapter in your doctrinal stance.**

We, the purchased possession, have been given a full inheritance. We are the redeemed of the Lord. In Him we have an inheritance. In Him we are redeemed. And yet, the Spirit of promise has been given to you as the guarantee, the certainty, that you can and will come to possess, know, realize, and experience what He has given. Paul tells the church in verses 12 – 14 that those who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and have come to faith are sealed with the very Spirit who will bring them into the fullness, the possession, the experience, the reality of the salvation that they have received. What have they received? The inheritance. What is the Spirit doing? The Spirit is the guarantee of the possession and experience of that inheritance.

I'm reviewing here, but I'm doing it on purpose. I'm not just doing it to remind you what we talked about. I'm doing it so that you will see an order here. I'm going back a bit so that you will understand that the prayers that begin in verse 15 are the natural progression of what He's already stated. The prayers that we are about to begin looking at are nothing more Paul requesting that God do what he just stated to be what God wants to do. Paul begins to pray to God to work by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in their hearts to show them the things that have been freely given to them by God. Paul begins requesting God to do the very thing He describes in verses 12 – 14, in showing them what he's described in verses 3 – 11. So there is no changing topics here. Its one flow – a, b, c. a) the finished work, b) the Spirit as the guarantee c) therefore, the prayer for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Alright, so lets look specifically at our verses. I got a little ahead of myself there, but I wanted you to see the intentional order of what is going on in this chapter. Its actually a couple verses yet until we get into the actual prayer itself. First Paul says in verse 15

Eph 1:15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

It's difficult for me to decide how much time to spend on each word or sentence. I have a hard time moving past anything quickly when I fear that foundational realities might be misunderstood. If you start with false presuppositions and faulty foundations, you always end up with a skewed conclusion. Its hard for me to pass over words like faith and love without saying at least a few things, even at the risk of being repetitious.

Faith and love are frequently put together and used by Paul as a sort of measuring stick, or barometer, by which He gages a church's spiritual growth in the Lord. You'll find him saying things like.

- Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.
- Ephesians 3:17 I pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

- 2Thessalonians 1:3 I thank God that your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows [ever] greater;
- 1 Tim 1:5 "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and an unfeigned faith"
- Col 1:3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;

And the reason that this is something of a spiritual barometer for Paul is because faith and love are quite simply the mind of the Lord and the nature of the Lord working in a believer. Faith and love are the in-working and out-working of the One who is our life. You could say that one is His mind. The other is His nature. So really Paul is looking at churches for what he calls later in Ephesians "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Not how well people are imitating Jesus. But the measure of Christ working in each believer.

Contrary to what I once thought, faith is not what you and I believe about something. Faith is not a belief system. It is not trust. It is not hope. Somebody says "I have faith that God could part an ocean". That's not faith, that's your belief. It may be true, but it's something you believe He can do. Somebody says "I have faith that God will put a person of integrity in the White House". That's nice, but that's not faith, that is hope. That's a wish, something you'd like to see happen. Somebody says "I have faith that God will provide for my needs". That's nice too, but that is trust. That is not faith.

Faith is not belief. Faith is not trust. Faith is not hope. Faith is faith. Faith is the mind of Christ working in your soul. Faith is the view of spiritual reality that is present to the eyes of your heart subsequent to the revealing of Christ. Faith is a spiritual seeing, beholding, that is given to you by the Spirit. More than that, it is actually the Spirit's beholding, His view working in your soul. It is not your understanding of a spiritual thing. It is the Spirit's understanding of all things being wrought in your heart. And so faith is when His mind in you by new birth begins to bring you to His view.

And, of course, that necessarily brings forth the reality and substance of what is not seen. Sure, how could it not be so? If you come to share His view, His mind, His heart, His perspective...how are you going to live contrary to that? How are you going to manifest something other than that. Even in the natural, are you able to live contrary to your view of reality. Can I make myself scared of a lion that I don't see? Will I feel angry towards a person that I don't even know to exist?

You will live according to whatever view of spiritual reality is working in you. You will become a manifestation of whatever view of Truth is being written on your heart by the finger of God. In other words, you will live by faith...whatever measure of faith is really there. And what comes out from faith is always the fragrance of what faith sees. And when that faith is the faith of the Son of God, when that faith is the mind of Christ, then what comes out is love.

See, that is why it is Paul's barometer. Faith, the mind of Christ, bringing forth love, the nature of Christ.

Now love has even more misconceptions and carnal notions surrounding it than does faith. You put 20 people in a room and ask them what love is and you'll have 20 different answers. And that is because the natural mind defines everything for itself until it sees Christ as the definition of all spiritual things. How many natural minds do you have in front of you? That's the exact number of definitions you'll have of faith, love, glory, truth, heaven, fellowship, hope, transformation, etc.

Love is not there for you to define. Love is the nature of God that works in you by faith. We've talked about this before, but see that is exactly what remains in Christ. There is faith – His view working in your soul. Hope, better translated "expectation" – the expectant realizing and progressive possessing of with faith sees. And love – the manifestation of all that Christ is. And the greatest of these is the actual coming forth of the Person. The greatest of these is when your soul actually bears the image and fragrance and expression of the Person. The greatest of these is love. Now these three remain – faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.

But again, love isn't there to be defined by whatever we think is nice. Love isn't good deeds, Christmas cards, hugs, and homeless shelters. **Love will never be defined by works. But works can be the outworking of love.** You can't look at a work and say "there is some love". You have to first know love, and then you might see some works of love. Can you hear that?

You can't look at a work and say it was motivated by love. How in the world could you possibly know that? Do you know how many "loving" things are done for selfish gain even in my own slimy heart? Do you know how many dead religions busy themselves with "loving" acts? Is that love? How do you know? Again, you can't define love by works. But when you know Him who is love, and abide in Him who is love, then you might find works becoming the outworking of the person of Love.

This shouldn't sound foreign to you. This is what John is saying in his entire first epistle. 1 John is almost entirely about the Person of Love working through the ones who abide in Him.

1Jo 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1Jo 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1Jo 4:12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

1Jo 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

But you read these verses and the natural temptation is, again, to define love based on works, and then either have cause for pride or condemnation. I'm doing well loving. I'm not doing well loving. But love is not something you do, it is something He is. And it works in you by faith. Love is not really defined by the thing done, but by the One doing it in and through you. God is love, and the one abiding in God, can bring forth His nature.

So do you see what Paul is saying here as sort of an introduction to why he is praying for these folks in Ephesus. He's more or less saying that I know that God

has begun a genuine work of the Spirit in you, and therefore I'm praying for more. I've heard that faith and love are working in and through you, and I realize this to be a work of God and not man-made religion or self-willed discipline. Therefore, I'm praying for the Spirit to show you even more.

But, to be very clear, when Paul was looking for faith and love working in a church, he was not running down a checklist looking at doctrines and good deeds. He was looking to see whether the One who was in them by new birth was working in them according to His mind and His nature. Faith and love. And whenever he found that, Paul rejoiced. Whenever Paul got word from Timothy or Titus that faith and love were working in a certain congregation he rejoiced and prayed for even more. That is what he is doing here.

Now, understanding that love is not defined by works, but rather true works are defined by love, we can talk a little bit about what love looks like in a body. Paul was obviously aware of the love working in them. How did he recognize it? How is it known?

You've probably read in the Scripture that love is made manifest in the laying down of your life. And you've certainly heard that we are to "love our neighbor as ourselves". Both of these statements are true. And yet both of them have to be understood in the context of the finished work of the cross..or, like all things, they mean to us whatever we want them to mean.

You see, laying down your life for your brother or sister is not just sacrificing things you want or time and money you have, in order to help somebody. I know that sounds really nice. But generally, we only make sacrifices that have some sort of pay-off on the other side. Isn't that true? The natural man, with our self-consumed heart, will genuinely only lay down something in order to pick up something better. We make temporary sacrifices for long-term rewards. We may forfeit something of ours, but the proud feeling of having done so is often more important to us than the thing we forfeited.

I'll let you make personal application there. My point isn't to be harsh. My point is just to say that the laying down of our life is more than just giving away time, money, or possessions for a good cause. The laying down of our life, in the body of Christ, is exactly that – the laying down of **our life**. Not parts of it, but the very self of it. Not just some money, some time, some possession. It's the loss of our life in order to be used as a vessel of His life for His body. It has to do with allowing the Spirit to work the reality of the cross in us. To the measure that we face our end in Him we can be used by Him as a vessel of love.

And sure, that works out through us in ways that are visible, tangible, helpful. But it's a bigger reality than simply laying down your preferences, your agenda, your plans, and your dreams. It's the laying down of **you**, so that love, the Person, is free to administer Himself to His body.

And its only when the YOU is lost, that you can love your neighbor as yourself. Its only in coming to see that you have no life but Christ, and that Christ is all and in all, and that you are a vessel of Him or you are nothing at all...it's only in this view of reality that your neighbor actually becomes, in a sense, part of yourself.

I'm not being mystical or weird. I'm simply saying that the more we know the reality of the cross, the more we see Romans 12:5 to be a reality.

Rom 12:5 "so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." Or...

1Co 12:13 "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." Or...

1 Cor 6:17 "those who have been joined to the Lord have become one spirit".

Col 3:11 [In Christ] there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

Do you see, when you come to know the reality of salvation, you see that you've lost a life and been filled with Another. And it is only in losing the one who always seeks itself, that the Other can work in you and through you. And that is called love. The One who is in you, now working through you His nature. And that nature is patient and kind and seeks not its own gain and keeps no record of wrongs, etc. Those aren't things you learn how to do. A person can't teach another person how to love. That's like teaching a rock how to float. No, those are things that He is that work in you by His Spirit.

And the more that faith sees this reality, the more you begin to comprehend that each one that shares the same life is quite literally a member of yourself. As Paul says "you are individually members of one another". Yes, a hand, a foot, an eye...all parts of one body. And it is then, and only then, that you can love anything as yourself. Do you see? You can only love someone as yourself when you come to see them to be part of yourself. One Spirit. One body. Christ all and in all.

And again, yes that then works out. That is expressed. But it is always realization before manifestation. It's always faith working out through love (Gal 5:6). It's always one life laid down now bringing forth the life of Another. We must know ourselves to be one body, one spirit, before we can love our neighbor as ourselves.

And so getting back into Ephesians, this is what Paul was glad to see. This is what Paul heard was happening in Ephesus – a genuine work of the Spirit. And therefore Paul began to pray.

[Eph 1:15](#) Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, [Eph 1:16](#) do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

So, again to lay out the order. We have the finished work described. Then the promised work of the Spirit in us guaranteed. Now Paul says that He recognizes the reality of the work of the Spirit already bringing forth faith and love. And therefore He prays that God continue to work in and through these believers through the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

We'll get more into the actual prayer next week. I'll just conclude here with a few words about prayer itself. Paul says here "I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers". This is similar to several other Scriptures

where Paul speaks of "prayer without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17) or "I do not cease praying for you" (Col 1:9).

I'd like to just say a few things about prayer that may or may not be helpful to you. I remember when I first started seeing the cross. I could say it like this – I remember when faith, the mind of the Lord, had its beginnings in my heart. Incidentally, that was decades after I became a Christian. It took me a while to humble my proud carnal mind and ask the Spirit to teach me. At that time I had, for a number of years, disciplined myself to spend a significant amount of time every day in what I called "intercessory prayer". Well, when I started to see the cross, I began to see that so much of my prayer life was not much more than me doing one of three things. Either I was 1) telling God what I would like to see Him do, 2) telling God the things that I thought He wanted to hear from me. Or 3) Asking God to help me get better in all of the innumerable ways where I clearly saw my lack.

Now, maybe you're saying "what's wrong with that?". Well, the more I saw the Truth the more I saw that everything was wrong with that. First of all, prayer wasn't just my way of getting God to do the things I wanted to see. He isn't a vending machine in heaven that requires a \$1.25 worth of time and tears. Second of all He didn't write the Bible so that I would methodically repeat it back to him in the form of prayer. And third, I came to see that He was not remotely interested in making me better at anything. On the contrary, He was interested in His increase in and through me becoming my decrease. Christ formed IN me, not Jason acting LIKE Him.

Well, that put a serious flat tire on my prayer life. And for a time I remember simply telling God, as it says in Romans chapter 8, "Lord, I just don't know how to pray as I ought". "Worse than that, Lord...I don't even know what prayer really is." Well, that might sound pathetic, and I suppose it is pathetic, but I actually believe the Lord loves hearing things like that. Because its from there that He can actually teach you something. Its from there that there is actually room in your heart for Him to show you some Truth. Nevertheless, I felt like I was "backsliding" in my spiritual discipline. And indeed I was because "spiritual discipline" is a man-made concept, and is, in fact, an oxy-moron. A contradiction in terms...as though your discipline can make you spiritual. How in the world would I discipline MYSELF to do something the Spirit is supposed to be doing in me? I'll leave that alone.

Well over the course of the next couple years, in re-wiring my understanding of the gospel, the Lord also began re-wiring my understanding of prayer. It wasn't overnight. But little by little I began to see that prayer became to Paul very much like breathing. What I mean by that is this. Prayer became to Paul simply the mind of Christ naturally working in Him the burdens and petitions and desires that were, in fact, the Lord's. When Paul "prayed without ceasing" it wasn't because he disciplined himself to do so. It actually had nothing to do with discipline.

Does your mind have to discipline itself to long for your will? Philippians 2:13 "...it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure" Well, when the mind of Christ begins to work in your soul, you find your heart longing after and petitioning God for the things that are out from Him. And so Paul can say in Philippians chapter 1

Phi 1:8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection [Gr. "bowels" or "inward parts"] of Jesus Christ. **9** And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,

Do you see the order here. First the "bowels", the affections of Jesus Christ worked in Paul. Prayer then became the breathing out, the longing after, the calling out for what was already working within. It wasn't burdensome. It wasn't spiritual-exercise. Prayer became to Paul a participation in the life and heart of God. And so, even without petition, it becomes in us a 24/7 union and communion with the living God.

But I'm speaking here specifically of petition because of the context of our verse. Paul's petitions weren't his good ideas about what would be nice for God to do. They weren't a so-called "spiritual discipline". They were not a repeating back to God the things that God told Him to say. They were not requesting that God fix Paul. Prayer was quite simply the mind of the Lord coursing through Paul's very soul in the form of desire and petition. Prayer was something that was "in the name of Jesus".

You know this. But "in the name of Jesus" isn't something you say after you're done praying your own will. Praying "in the name of Jesus" is praying in His name, His nature, His life, His heart, His mind, His burden, His life. The name of God is the sum of His attributes and the reality of His existence. You pray in that name only when that name is formed in you. You pray out from that name when that name has put your name away. Its not a tag-line at the end of your desires that ropes God into giving you want you want. It's a Person working in your soul, out from whom you breathe the very heart of God. Prayer becomes the mind of the Lord, the "bowels of Jesus Christ" bringing your heart into agreement with His will. And then it can be without ceasing because that Life, that name, that heart never ceases operating in your soul.

So that leads us up to the actual prayer that Paul records in the next couple verses. We'll look into that next week. Amen.