

A Living Grace
Ephesians 3:7-13
(Ephesians 1:15-23)

Turn in your Bibles this morning to Ephesians 1 where I want to continue from last week our discussion on the responsibility each member of the body of Christ – His Church – has toward each other. Last week we discussed that Paul offers praise to the church for two things.

He praised them for their faith. They had both a saving faith and a sanctifying faith. Faith not only brought them into the forever family of God's kingdom, faith also helped them in their daily lives. Faith assists us in living a godly life. We find in **Hebrews 11:6** that **“without faith it is impossible to please God.”**

By faith we believe God keeps His promises.

By faith we believe God is with us throughout all of life's experiences – good and bad.

By faith we believe God cares about us and has our best interest at heart.

By faith we believe that everything that happens to us is for our good and God's glory.

The second thing that Paul praised them for was their love for one another. As a church they were taking on the very character of Christ in the way they responded to each other. To the degree we love God is the degree to which we will love others.

We noted several things about how we should love others.

Love serves.

Love encourages.

Love unifies.

Love forgives.

We are to love unconditionally, unceasingly, uncompromisingly, intentionally, and indiscriminately. It doesn't matter who, it doesn't matter when, it doesn't matter where. God is our model and I Corinthians 13 is our measuring stick. Paul praised them because the love of God was

evident among them. But Paul also prayed for them and he outlines that prayer.

I. PAUL'S OUTLINES PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH – v. 16b-23

“I have not stopped...remembering you in my prayers.”

Let's do a sense check and ask how often do we pray for one another? Use the prayer sheet to remember the sick and the afflicted. Pray for those who are out of work. Pray for those going through emotional or spiritual battles of one kind or another. Pray for the tangible needs of others. Those are notable things to petition the Lord for.

As the church, Paul gives us an outline of things that we should be praying about for one another, things that the Deacons and I should be praying about for you as part of this church, things that you can pray about for our Deacons and teachers and me as your pastor.

Notice the specific things that he prays about for them to receive.

A. Paul Prays For Intimacy With God

Verse 17 – “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (understanding), so that you may know Him better.”

He doesn't pray for wisdom and insight about their work or about improving relationships or even about how to handle a difficult boss or neighbor. Paul prays that they might have wisdom and understanding to know God better and to know the blessings that come from Him.

When I counsel couples who come into my office who want to get married, I will repeatedly remind them throughout our counseling that the kind of

relationship they have with God will have a direct bearing on their relationship with each other. That same advice holds for all of us. The kind of relationship we have with God will determine the kind of relationship we have with others. My prayer is that you will know God better.

Paul wants them to know God more intimately, to better understand the many blessings and benefits that are ours because of this relationship we have with God. The word “**knowing**” here does not mean having, as one author put it, an “abstract knowledge about God or even objective facts about Him, but knowing Him personally and intimately. It includes an intimate awareness of God’s character and will.” Philosophy tells us to know ourselves. Christianity tells us to know God.

J. Vernon McGee writes “A brilliant mind doesn’t guarantee an understanding of God’s truth.”
The question is how well do you know Him?

Warren Wiersbe notes that Paul “did not ask God to give them what they did not have, but that He would reveal what they already had.”

William Hearst was a very wealthy newspaper publisher. From his vast wealth he had invested a fortune collecting art from around the world. One particular day he read the description of a piece of art that he just had to have so he sent his agent to look for and purchase this rare piece of art. After a considerable amount of time and money had been spent on pursuing this piece for his collection the agent returned home, empty handed. Hearst asked where the piece of art was to which the agent told him that it was in the warehouse. He had it the whole time.

The more intimately we are acquainted with God, the more we come to understand what is already ours. We need to pray for ourselves and each other that we might know God better, to more fully

understand what we He has given us. Paul prays for intimacy with God.

Paul also prays for enlightenment.

B. Paul Prays for Enlightenment

According to Wikipedia “the Age of Enlightenment was a cultural movement of intellectuals in the 17th and 18th centuries, first in Europe and later in the American colonies. Its purpose was to reform society using reason, challenge ideas grounded in tradition and faith, and advance knowledge through the scientific method. It promoted science, skepticism and intellectual exchange, challenged superstition, intolerance and some abuses by church and state.”

Immanuel Kant wrote "Enlightenment was mankind's final coming of age, the emancipation of the human consciousness from an immature state of ignorance." They would consider matters of faith and even God Himself to be out of step and out of place in modern culture because it doesn't fall in line with reason. Faith to them is irrational because it's not founded on or substantiated with empirical knowledge.

But that’s not what we’re talking about here. Paul wants the believers to have the spiritual eyes of their heart opened so that they can see and understand the truths that God has for them to know and live by. **And just how are these things revealed to us?**

I Corinthians 2:9-10 “But as it is written, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things which God has revealed to them that love Him. But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, yea the deep things of God.’”

The NLT says that the Spirit reveals God’s deep secrets to us. We can only come to know the things God has for us from the Holy Spirit and then only

those who have been saved can those things be revealed because He only indwells the believer. At times we sing the old hymn

Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou has for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine.

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What is it that he wants them to understand?

Understand their hope
Understand the riches of their inheritance
Understand the power of God available to them

When we place our faith in Christ there is a hope that assures us of what has been promised.

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

The pessimism of French philosopher Francois Rabelais is a sad commentary for those without hope in an age that flaunts reason. “I am going to the great Perhaps.” How would you like to live that kind of lack of certainty about your final destiny?

Aristotle in all his wisdom got it wrong when he announced that death “is the end of everything.”

Our hope in Christ gives us a sure destination.

The hymn writer’s (526) pen eloquently attests that My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus name.

On Christ the solid Rock I stand.
All other ground is sinking sand.
All other ground is sinking sand.

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The church must rest in the assurance of the promise made by the one who said that there is nothing to fear because He was going away to prepare a place for us He would also come back to get us so we could be where He is – forever. In that we have hope, confident assurance.

Paul also prays that we may be enlightened about or better understand the riches that are ours in Christ. Some of these are mentioned in **verses 3-14**.

Then Paul prays that they might understand God’s “**incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.**”

Many Christians today spend a great deal of time asking God to give them something they already have. They pray for strength to overcome a temptation or sin.

They pray for strength to help them through some trial or difficulty.

They pray for strength to face a boss about a problem.

Scripture tells us we already have that strength.

Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Isaiah 41:10

His power is available to us already. It isn’t doled out in portions like some time released capsule based on our maturity level as a Christian or how many verses we memorize or how many spiritual battles we win. It’s not like a video game where I can earn more power by collecting hearts or life tokens. Because I am in Christ I have all of Christ and His power available to me. *When I am defeated by some temptation or defeated by some difficulty in life it isn’t because I don’t possess enough spiritual power, it’s because I haven’t appropriated or applied what I already have.*

II Peter 1:3-4 “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

As a matter of fact Paul says here that the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him on the throne in heaven is the same power that is available to us and will also raise us from the dead and seat us in the heavenlies with Him.

John MacArthur “Since He [Jesus] has such a unique and intimate relationship with the redeemed whom He loves, all His power will be used in their behalf to fulfill His loving purpose for them.”

As His church, His body, our response is to know Him more intimately. When we do that we will grow our faith, show our love and pray for others.

But something else becomes available to us. We see it in the passage for today. Turn over a couple of chapters to **Ephesians 3:7-13**. What we see is something that is only available through God’s grace. It also is something for His people, the church. It was very evident to Paul and he wants us to know about it.

Paul was a servant by God’s grace
Paul was strengthened by God’s grace

II. PAUL WAS A SERVANT BY GOD’S GRACE – v. 7-11

V. 7 – “I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of His power.”

Paul assumes no degree of superiority over those he is writing to. As a matter of fact, when you read

this passage he has a very keen sense of where he really stands with God, he has a very humble perception of himself. Notice what he says about himself in **verse 8 – “I am less than the least of all God’s people...”** In essence he’s saying he didn’t deserve any of it. That’s humility. That’s God’s grace. That should be our attitude as well. It’s not mock humility. It’s not false pride. He’s not having a little pity party here wishing that people would recognize him for all he has done for Christ and the church or bragging about all the suffering he’s endured. He wasn’t asking them to throw him a party and give him a plaque for years of dedicated service.

In view of the context it is very much the opposite. As he thinks about who he was before Christ and who he is now in Christ he can’t help but think of himself as nothing special that God would use him in such a way. He’s really saying he didn’t deserve any of it, but God showed special favor toward him just as He shows us.

It wasn’t because of his education being brought up in the traditions of the Pharisees that he is now God’s spokesman.

It wasn’t because of years of ministry experience. It wasn’t because he was a gifted orator or debater. To the Corinthians he claimed to be the least of the apostles and didn’t even deserve to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church.

(I Corinthians 15:9)

To Timothy **(I Timothy 1:12-13)** he counted it a privilege to be a servant of Christ even though before he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor and even a violent man toward the church.

He also told Timothy that Christ came into the world to die for sinners and he claimed to be the chief or worst of them all. **(I Timothy 1:15)** Paul says he was a servant of Christ not because he deserved it or earned it, but by grace alone.

The one wish I would have for the kids going up to Barakel is that they would have gotten to meet

Uncle Johnnie. You didn't have to be around him very long to understand he was a special man who loved the Lord. When you read the story about how Barakel was started and when you talked with Uncle Johnnie, you got the same picture of how Paul thought of himself, he was very humble. He would say he wasn't anything special. He wasn't a big time conference speaker or Bible scholar or great preacher. He didn't write any books. He was pastor of a little country church who only wanted to be faithful to the Lord who saved him. But the Lord had some big plans for him. He would tell you that anyone could have done what he did; he was just someone who was willing to unload the wagons. Like Paul he would tell you what he did at Barakel was by God's grace.

Let's not forget that. We serve by God's grace. Remember He doesn't use many mighty or worldly wise people, but rather the foolish and the weak. That way we have nothing to boast about because it's all by God and through God's grace.

Some Christians have the notion that God should be glad they are on His team, that somehow God must be thrilled with who they are and all they do for the kingdom and how much better off the church is because they are involved. Why, if it weren't for them churches wouldn't have been built, mission agencies wouldn't have been founded, souls would still be lost. They think they're mighty important.

That couldn't be further from the truth. The more Paul aged in Christ the greater was the sense of his own sin and weakness in himself and the more he recognized that he needed God's power to do the ministry he was called to do. That's what happens to great saints. They don't see themselves as great assets, they see themselves as greater sinners saved by grace and serve by grace.

His assessment of himself was that he was God's servant. That was something he reminded everyone he wrote to. The word literally means someone

who waits on tables. You know them. They are the waiters at a restaurant. When you sit down they wait on you. They take your order and bring you extra napkins. They bring your water or pop or coffee and keep it filled. They ask if you need anything else. They are there to serve you.

In the context here, Paul is not talking about the person of a servant but rather about the activity the servant does. His activity was by God's grace. It's not activity he chose for himself, but one he acknowledges came from God. Service, his and ours, is initiated by the gift of God's grace and we continue in that activity by the working of God's power. If we served in our own strength then we would eventually loathe our position being a servant. We would come to despise it. We would desire to remove ourselves from that position and seek something else, something that might be more fitting of our skills and abilities and position. We would seek to elevate ourselves and promote ourselves. But Paul served by the grace of God, it was God's power to see himself in such a lowly estate. He saw it as a desirable place to be. He was serving the very Christ who by grace saved him. Only through grace can we remain where we are and serve with a willing heart.

Now notice in this passage as well the activity of service he was called to.

Verses 7-11

Simply put, his task as God's servant by grace was to preach the gospel. In the original the word preach is our word for evangelize. He was called to be a witness of God's saving grace. That's our calling too. His was to preach specifically to the Gentiles. Now it was not to the exclusion of the Jews. We read repeatedly in Acts that when Paul went into a city he would first go to the local synagogue where the Jews met and preach there. When they ignored or rejected the message or threw him out he would go to the Gentiles. Paul didn't hang around Jerusalem or Judea. He went

throughout the northern Mediterranean region and eventually to Rome. He was to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Unsearchable is a word that means it can't be searched out. Now that doesn't mean it is something we can't understand because we don't know what we are looking for or where to begin. It means that it has no ending. It would be like an astronomer looking into the mysteries of the universe. The more he discovers the more he realizes there is yet to discover. His knowledge increases but so do the questions that are yet unanswered.

God's riches have no end. His riches are unsearchable. *As one author notes, the riches of Christ "are far beyond what we can know, but not what we can appreciate."*

Romans 11:33 "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out."

v. 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?"

Paul is arguably the greatest theologian to ever live, yet even he couldn't fully comprehend all that is ours in Christ, but it didn't keep him from appreciating what he did know and it didn't keep him from preaching it to others.

I think sometimes we're afraid to share the gospel because we're afraid someone might ask us a question we can't answer. Preach what you know. It's the job of the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to the heart of someone who is seeking.

Paul writes that the riches of Christ have been a mystery for a long time, but now they have been revealed and he has the privilege of sharing it with the Gentiles.

I found the definition of mystery in the dictionary to be very interesting. According to the etymology of

the word in the Latin the word is *mysterium* and in the New Testament it refers to a supernatural thing. In the Greek it is *mysterion* which means a secret rite, but in the New Testament it is a divine secret. The dictionary further defines mystery as something unexplained, unknown, or kept secret.

Paul explains what this mystery had been hidden for a long time. It is not the mystery that the Gentiles would be saved. There are a number of passages in the Old Testament that make reference to the Gentiles experiencing God's salvation. **Verse 6** explains the mystery that is now revealed. **"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 3:6)**
Romans 15:9-12

Simply put, Paul explains the mystery that Jews and Gentiles who are saved by grace through faith are joint heirs of what has been promised. There isn't a body or church or even a place in heaven made up of just Jews. There isn't a body or church or place in heaven made up of just Gentiles. Three times Paul says the Gentiles are "heirs together," "members together," "sharers together" in the promise in Christ. This was not known or revealed in the Old Testament. Old Testament prophets may have talked about Gentiles being saved, but there is no mention that the two would be made one. When a Jew gets saved, he or she is brought into this unique relationship as part of the body of Christ. When a Gentile gets saved he or she is brought into the same unique relationship as part of the same body of Christ with the Jew who was just saved. There is equal footing at the cross by the grace of God for both the Jew and the Gentile. There is no Jew or Gentile, bond or free, just one body. That is the mystery now revealed.

Not only has this mystery been revealed to us, it is also being revealed to the angels. Paul wrote that

“we (the Church) are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels.” (I Corinthians 4:9)

Peter affirms that even in Old Testament times the angels were curious about God’s plan of salvation **(I Peter 1:10-12).**

Here’s what Warren Wiersbe says about the curiosity of the angels on this matter. “What, then, do the angels learn from the church? [According to Ephesians 3:10 they learn “The manifold wisdom of God” that Jews and Gentile are joined together in the Church.] Certainly the angels know about the power of God as seen in His creation. But the wisdom of God as seen in His new creation, the church, is something new to them. Unsaved men, including wise philosophers, look at God’s plan of salvation and consider it “foolishness” (I Cor. 1:18-31). But the angels watch the outworking of God’s salvation, and they praise His wisdom. Paul called it manifold wisdom, and this word carries the idea of “many-colored.” This suggests the beauty and variety of God’s wisdom in His great plan of salvation.

This is the mystery Paul was making known through the preaching of the Gospel, a gospel he proclaimed both because he knew firsthand of the grace of God in his own salvation and also in the power of God’s grace to preach. Paul was a servant by God’s grace. So are we.

Paul was strengthened by God’s grace. So are we.

III. PAUL WAS STRENGTHENED BY GOD’S GRACE – v. 12-13

It is only by God’s grace through our relationship with Christ that we have access to God. There is no other way to come to Him. Greek scholar **Vincent speaks of access as the idea of “friendly access to God where we are acceptable to Him and where we have confidence that He is favorably disposed towards us.”**

That should strengthen and encourage us.

It is a confirmed and settled state of utter confidence. Where does such confidence come from? It does not come from anything we have or anything we have done or anything we are. This confidence is solely based on our new position in Christ. God sees us in Christ, completely righteous because we are robed in the righteousness of Christ.

Hebrews 4:14-16 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Emphasis added)

Because of this new relationship with Christ, both Jew and Gentile alike have access or freedom to approach the Father because we have favor with God through Jesus Christ. **According to William Hendriksen access is the “condition of the soul that rests in the Lord, surrendering fully to Him, trusting that He will in answer to prayer, fulfill every need.”**

Such confidence not only helps us to boldly come into God’s presence but it also gives us courage in life. It was God’s grace that gave Paul courage to face his many trials, even prison with the confidence that God had an eternal purpose for it. Such a plan was not to discourage the church at Ephesus, but rather embolden them to live for Christ by grace. Paul told the Philippians that such events served to advance the gospel (Phil. 1:12) The same message or encouragement is for us today. Don’t lose heart over trials and tribulations. Remember that the same grace given by God to Paul to help him remain faithful is the same grace available to us to strengthen us in our time of need so that we remain faithful to Him. Such confident access into the very throne room of God to which

He gives us ear enables us to overcome discouragement.

During such difficult times it is our responsibility and privilege to earnestly pray for one another to know God and understand the riches that are ours. Such knowledge helps us endure by the grace of God. Such example and witness are testimony to believer and unbeliever alike that the grace of God is sufficient for all things.