

## Prayer and Epignosis

Ephesians 1:17

Preparing for church?

- Hair or heart?
- To, for & around Jesus—God's ancient desire

Last week's assignment?

- Tangibly love, commend, rejoice in and pray for one Christian brother or sister this week

### Title | Prayer and Epignosis

- We spend so much of our lives doing things that don't actually matter. What does matter? More than anything else, what really matters? And what the heck is *epignosis* anyway?

We spoke last week about the fact that Paul was **commending** and **rejoicing** over the church in Ephesus for their **strong faith in the Lord Jesus and their agape love for God's people everywhere**.

- We (Reality) want to be known for this
- Our stance toward Jesus and others

Though the Ephesians were not perfect in either, and there was plenty of room for growth in both, Paul (Cf. HS) chose to interact with them graciously and encourage them where he saw evidence of God's grace working in them

- Commended them and rejoiced over them
- = Spiritually support

But he loved them, and he loved them too much to merely encourage them... he would also **pray** for them

- Ultimate form of spiritual support (Cf. prayer team)
- What he would pray for is the best thing we could ever pray for each other: **More of God in their lives!**

<sup>16</sup> I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, <sup>17</sup> asking God the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.

He prays for them **constantly**, which means he **regularly** and **consistently** does so

- The nature of prayer as portrayed in Scripture
- Not vain repetition
- But an expression of **earnest reliance**
  - Importunity (persistent insistence)
  - Matthew 7:7-8

**Keep on asking** and you will receive what you are asking for. **Keep on seeking** and you will receive will find. **Keep on knocking** and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

- Luke 18:1
- One day Jesus told His disciples a story to show that they should **always pray and never give up**.
  - Rest of text is a parable by contrast
  - It's not that God is like that—its that prayer is like that
  - Importunity (persistent insistence)

There are a couple of reasons why we need to pray **repeatedly—regularly** and **consistently**

- (1) Spiritual Warfare
  - **Daniel 10:12-14**
  - To pray is to engage the spiritual realm, where there is always a **battle**
  - Battles (by definition) always require perseverance and tenacity... always!
- (2) Spiritual Reliance
  - Praying repeatedly **keeps** us, or expresses that we **are**, or causes us to **become, dependent upon God**
  - Jesus told us it ought to be this way when he taught us to pray saying: "**Give us this day our daily bread**"
  - God wants us to position ourselves in such a way that we are relying upon Him and His provision to sustain our lives
    - There are 2 ways to do life:
      - Self-sustenance
      - God-sustenance
    - One is a **finite** and **limited** resource subject to **change, influence, failure and depletion**
    - The other is an **infinite** and **unlimited** resource which is **immutable, immoveable, unfailing and inexhaustible**
    - You choose
    - What you have chosen is **evidenced** by your prayer life
      - Self-sustenance = meager, infrequent praying
      - God-sustenance = earnest, frequent praying

Because we (as humanity) are innately aware of our frail finiteness **almost no one** lives a life totally void of prayer

- Foxhole prayers
  - Cf. Life's toughest moments
- The sinking ship story
- The deathbed
- Tragedies
  - “Our prayers are with the people in Haiti”
  - Cnt. “Our thoughts are with...”
    - A cultural countermovement to prayer
  - But no one in a foxhole hopes for miraculous delivery through the “thoughts” of another
    - They appeal to **Someone greater**
  - When we are on our deathbeds; or when our children are diagnosed with cancer (again) and given a 30% chance of survival—we need **divine intervention**
    - We don't need people to send us thoughts—we need them to pray
  - 77% of Americans believe that prayer can help heal someone from illness or injury<sup>1</sup>
    - When we are faced with our frailty, we intuitively **appeal to deity**
    - But there is part of the error
      - We appeal to God when everything is falling apart
      - **What if we started earlier and we appealed to God to be our everything?**

This is how Paul is praying for the Ephesians

What is the best way we can pray for someone?

The best sort of prayer is not merely an **appeal to God for help**—but rather an **appeal to God for Him!**

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.christianpost.com/news/77-percent-of-americans-believe-in-healing-power-of-prayer-55309/>

- Help from One who is **infinite** and **unlimited, immutable, immoveable, unfailing** and inexhaustible is one thing
- But to actually gain more of that One Himself—to actually experience Him is far greater!

This is exactly **what** Paul is praying for the church in Ephesus

- We saw **how** he was praying for them—regularly and consistently
- But **what** he is praying for them is fantastic

He was (v. 17) **asking God the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give [them] spiritual wisdom and insight so that [they] might grow in [their] knowledge of God.**

Notice the end goal:

- **that** [they] **might grow in [their] knowledge of God**
- **Spiritual wisdom and insight** (or a spirit of) to do so (Cf. v 8)
  - Biblical synonyms for **understanding the true nature of things and the correct approach to life**
  - He wants them to have a deep understanding of the **true nature of existence** so that they might **grow in their knowledge of God**

Here is what that **doesn't** mean:

- That they would **simply know** more about God
  - Mere knowledge is not what he is after for them
    - That doesn't do enough
    - Knowledge about God does not save you—God saves you
- What **we** need, what our **church** needs, what the **church in America** needs is **not more knowledge about God, but more of God!**

That is exactly what Paul is praying for the church in Ephesus

The word being translated **knowledge** here is not the usual Greek word **gnosis**

- The word here has a prefix attached to it that changes everything
- *Epignosis*
- *Epi* = preposition meaning *on, upon*
- Epignosis
  - More intense than *gnosis*
  - A deep, full knowledge; a thorough knowledge
  - Clear and exact knowledge
  - It expresses a more thorough participation in the object (God) on the part of the subject (us)
  - Participatory, experiential knowledge

This is what is needed—that we roll up our sleeves and dive into experiential knowledge about God

- Shaped/informed/dictated/restrained by scripture
- A full on pursuit of God—*epignosis*
- This is what actually matters in life

2 Peter 1:3

By His divine power, God has given us **everything we need** for living a godly life. We have received all of this **by coming to know** (epignosis) **Him**, the one who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence.

Cf. Hebrew *yada* and Genesis 4:1

- This is the OT heritage behind the word *epignosis*
- It is the spiritual parallel of this that Paul has in mind
- Cf. Priests in Jeremiah
- Jeremiah 29:11-13
- Cf. Matthew 7:22-23

**On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me...’**

**Knowing God (not merely about God) is eternal life**

- John 17:3  
**And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.**
- 1 Peter 3:18  
**Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.**

**This is what we were made for!!! (and saved for)**

- To know God and enjoy Him forever
- Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Him
- "Trying to be happy without a sense of God's presence is like trying to have a bright day without the sun." -A.W. Tozer
- Philippians 3:7-11  
7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 **Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.** For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. 10 **I want to know Christ** and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, 11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

**Here is one worthy pursuit—the one thing that really matters**

- You'll do so many things this week that won't mean anything or yield anything lasting
- **Do this one thing:** Pursue *epignosis* of God—to really know Him
- **And then do this:** Pray for someone else to have *spiritual wisdom* and insight to have *epignosis* of God
- **And for one church by name**