

Clear About the Gospel Bible Study

Ephesians 1.15-23

TEACHING OUTLINE

1. Start with announcements and prayer. (5 minutes)

2. Read aloud Ephesians 1.15-23. (5 minutes)

3. Discuss Paul's prayer of gratitude for the growth of strong faith in Christ and love for God's people in Ephesians 1.15-16. (15 minutes)

- Prayer central to this entire passage: "I pray for you constantly" (1.16b NLT); entire passage is Paul's prayer for Christians in Ephesus and elsewhere
- Important to note Eph 1.15-23 is also one long sentence in Greek text (like 1.3-14 is), so separate sentences in NIV and NLT not in original; ESV does better job of reflecting Greek text structure (with corresponding difficulties for some in following the text's flow)
- "For this reason" (NIV) or "Ever since I first heard" (NLT) connects this section with why Paul lifting up the Ephesians's faithfulness: heard a good report he's acknowledging
- Growth in the Ephesians's faith in Christ and in their love for one another as God's people celebratory in Paul's eyes, and something he prays for intentionally, probably because he has served and seen places without this level of faith and without this level of brotherly/sisterly love (Corinth, anyone?)
- Appropriate to ask: what do we pray for, regarding our Christian brothers and sisters? Tend to pray for illness, healing, and crises; but what about praying for growth in faith and love?
- Helpful to review Paul's history with Ephesian ministry in Acts 19.1-41, 20.17-36 as context for some of Paul's gratitude; circularity of letter limits specific references to this gracious history

4. Discuss Paul's prayer for their growth in spiritual wisdom and insight in Ephesians 1.17-18. (10 minutes)

- As Paul has prayed to give thanks for the Ephesians's growth in faith and love, now he prays for their continued growth in their spiritual wisdom and insight
- Again, rare prayer topic for 21st century American churches: tend to focus on overt concerns with often negative consequences: decline of health, loss of job, breakdown of marriage, problems with children in school, etc.
- But here focus on spiritual characteristics and development of Christian character: how they may continue to grow in aforementioned faith and love, and how they may make good and wise decisions in the days ahead
- "Hearts flooded with light" (v. 18 NLT) evocative way to describe what other translations call "enlightened" (NIV)

5. Discuss Paul's prayer for their growth in and appreciation of God's incredible power in Ephesians 1.19-23. (10 minutes)

- Power of God is Paul's preeminent focus for prayer of Ephesians: that they may "understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him." (1.19 NLT)
- Same power that raised Jesus from grave and to honor at right hand of the Father is same power at work in their lives; also same power placing Christ as head of the church
- Paul prays for Ephesian Christians to come to this heightened understanding and practice; again, a different sort of prayer request than usually offered
- Klyne Snodgrass: "Belief in God's power may be easy in the abstract, but can people today really believe in the resurrection or in the availability of God's power for living? Christianity is a religion about power, for it focuses on the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. Modern Christianity sometimes makes the mistake of focusing on the death of Jesus or on various ethical ideas, treating the resurrection as almost an afterthought. Instead, the focus must be on the 'twin event' of the death and resurrection, with the understanding that a third event, the pouring out of the Spirit, flows directly from the resurrection. All else derives from these three events."
(*Ephesians: NIV Application Commentary*, 84)

6. Close with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- As you read aloud Ephesians 1.15-23, what are some of your first observations about the passage? Why?
- Prayer is central to Paul's agenda for the Ephesians. How often does he pray for them? Why is he so grateful for them?
- Growth in faith and love isn't usually one of our prayers for others. Instead we are more likely to pray for particular needs, like health concerns or family crises. How can we incorporate prayers for the spiritual growth of our loved ones and friends as we pray for them?
- Paul is concerned that the spiritual wisdom and insight of the Ephesians may continue to develop. What in the Ephesians's circumstances might make Paul so willing and desirous to pray for their maturing wisdom and insight?
- As we pray for those we love, how might we put into words our concern for their continuing growth in wisdom and insight? What particular issues, concerns, and situations might prompt our specific prayers along these lines?
- Power is largely frowned upon in many Christian circles and seen as a major obstacle to Christian witness. But Paul overtly prays for the Ephesian Christians to "understand the incredible greatness of God's power." In what ways does he want them to understand God's power, according to the passage?
- How is God's power differentiated from our power? What happens when our power is emphasized above God's power? What ministry or service happens when there is a better understanding and practice of God's power versus our power? Give examples.