

I. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS (Ephesians 1:15-3:21)

3.

A. [THE MOTIVATION FOR PAUL'S PRAYER] (Ephesians 1:15-16)

In the Salutation to his letter, Paul explained the great revelation that God had given to him. In the body of his letter he told them he was praying for them to have the wisdom and insight to understand that great revelation. He wanted them to grasp it and be thrilled by it as he was. From Ephesians 1:15 through 3:13 he sought to explain to them the significance of his prayer, and then in Ephesians 3:14-21 he recorded the content of his prayer. He spent much more time explaining his prayer than he spent in praying his prayer, because he knew if they were going to understand, it would take careful explanation plus God's opening their hearts to receive the explanation.

Paul began right away to explain the purpose for which he was writing to the Ephesian church. His purpose was to explain to them what he was praying for God to do for them. From Ephesians 1:15 through Ephesians 3:13, he explained what he was praying for in their behalf. In Ephesians 3:14-21, he recorded the prayer he was praying.

Many have said that Ephesians 1:17-23 contains the first of two prayers that Paul prayed for the Ephesians, the second being the prayer he wrote in Ephesians 3:14-21. However, Ephesians 1:17-23 was addressed to the Ephesians, not to God. They are verses that explain the reason for his prayer, so they would be able to understand what he was asking God to do for them. Understanding these verses as a different prayer from the one in chapter 3 gives the impression that Paul prayed for two different things. He did not. He had one great longing for the Ephesians, and he stuck closely to that one emphasis throughout the whole book.

- A. *This is why* (1:15-16):
1. *Since hearing about* (1:15b):
 - a. *Your faith in the Lord Jesus* (1:15c),
 - b. *And your love for all the saints* (1:15d),
 2. *I never stop giving thanks for you* (1:16)
 - a. *Making mention of you* (1:16b)
 - b. *In my prayers* (1:16c).

In verses 15-16, Paul explained why he was motivated to pray a special prayer for them and how earnestly he was praying.

Verse 15. What inspired me to pray for you. As Paul prepared the Ephesians to understand his prayer, he first explained what prompted him to write to them on this vital subject. He said he was praying because he had heard of their faith in Jesus and of their love for all the saints.

Some have concluded that verses 15-16 indicate that someone wrote this letter who had

never been to Ephesus, because it only says the writer had heard of their faith and love. Those interpreters acknowledge that Paul had spent three years in Ephesus, so they say that, if Paul had written this letter, he would not have written that he had only heard of their faith and love. Yet they say the writer claimed to be Paul to get the attention of the Ephesian believers. That conclusion is not valid. Why indeed would anyone think he could gain a hearing with the Ephesians by using Paul's name and then acting as if he did not know them when they both knew Paul had ministered for three years among them?

According to the Book of Acts, it had been about four years since Paul had last had personal contact with the Ephesian believers. He had been a prisoner most of that time. He had been confined in Caesarea for two years, had spent the better portion of a year under guard on a sea voyage to Rome, and had been under house arrest in Rome for one year or less. Communication between Ephesus and Caesarea or between Ephesus and Rome was slow and difficult in those days, and that difficulty was greatly increased because of the limitations of Paul's imprisonment. Therefore, he had been out of touch with the Ephesians for long enough for many things to happen that could have changed conditions in the church. It was refreshing news to him when he heard conditions were going well with the church and that its members had grown in their faith in Jesus and in their love for all believers.

The statement Paul made about what he had heard about the Ephesian Christians was a magnificent compliment. He indicated that they had become mature in two aspects of their Christian lives during the time since he had left them.

First, they had gained a mature faith in the Lord Jesus. Their faith had been tested, and the testing had only made their faith stronger. Paul had left his ministry in Ephesus because of a riot, but that tragic development did not lessen their faith. Neither was their faith weakened when they heard of Paul's long imprisonment. Their sufferings and the sufferings they had heard about Paul's experiencing had only deepened their faith. Their initial belief had blossomed into a genuine commitment to Jesus that made Him preeminent in their lives. The good news Paul had heard about them made him believe they were ready to understand the great revelation God had given to him.

Second, they had developed a mature love for all the saints. That statement was a huge expression of praise. It revealed the attitude, emotion, feeling that had come to fill their hearts toward other believers. That attitude was love. When Paul described their love, he used the exalted word that Bible writers had invented to describe an emotion that only God can place in a person's heart. He

used the word *αγαπέ* (*agape*), which far outreaches any emotion known to pagan or unredeemed people. It means a genuine feeling of compassion for others. It means to sincerely care about others more than about one's self. It means to be willing to sacrifice one's self for the benefit of others. Jesus brought that kind of love into the world and demonstrated it when He gave His life on the Cross. He did more than demonstrate that kind of love. He gave it as a gift to those who fully yield their lives to Him, so they too could have that kind of love for others. The Ephesians had learned to have and to express that kind of genuine unselfish Godly love.

Paul's words complimented the Ephesian Christians even more when he described whom they loved. They had learned to love all believers, wherever they were and whoever they were. They had grown beyond loving only their own families. They had even grown beyond loving only members of their church. They had learned to love all the saints, including believers of other nationalities, languages, ethnicities, and eccentricities. They had even learned to love the Jews, those most peculiar of all people. That kind of love is unusual even today. Who in your church or mine loves all believers in their neighborhoods, or on the other side of the church auditorium, or in other near-by churches, or in other states, or in other nations? The Ephesian Christians were unique. They were the kind of people who could understand Paul's revelations of God's intention to bring all things into unity at the End.

The news Paul had received about the Ephesian Christians convinced him that they were the most mature of all the churches he had founded. Therefore, they above all the others were ready to receive the revelation God was stirring in his heart. Since he could not visit them to share it, he undertook to write it to them and to let them know he was praying for them to understand the message as fully as if he were present with them to preach it to them in person.

Verse 16. How earnestly I am praying for you. Paul was so pleased over the good news he had learned about the Ephesian Christians that he said he could not stop thanking God for what he had heard about them. He was so thrilled he never

ceased to pray for them and to ask that they be given wisdom to go even further in their understanding. It made him dare to write to them about the ultimate unity in Christ that had been revealed to him and to explain that he was praying for God to enable them to understand it also. It is not strange, therefore, that Paul was motivated by the news he had received about the Ephesian

believers to write to them to share the great convictions that were growing in his heart about the ultimate unity of all things in Christ. His prayer for them to understand was so deep he could not stop praying it. It was on his heart day and night. His prayer for them was so earnest, he had to write and share with them what he prayed God would enable them to understand.