Ephesians 1:15-17: Paul’s Prayer I

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

This passage is technical, and we’re going to draw on language constructs and cross references to determine some nuance in parts of what we look at. This sort of study requires a bit more patience and may lack in some practical application in places, but is rewarding because a fuller context may be had for the rest of the epistle to the Ephesians.

It’s also worth noting that Paul tended to write list-style thoughts in his letters. Ephesians is no exception and this description of Paul’s prayer life bears this out.

# For This Reason, I too [The First Time]

This passage has a complex sentence structure that demands a bit more care to follow Paul’s statements with the parenthetical comment brought forward. We’re going to step past ‘for this reason and get to the reasons, then get to the outcome of the action motivated by the reasons.

## Having Heard of the Faith in the Lord Jesus Which Exists Among You

### Faith in the Lord Jesus

In the last two verses we saw faith described, but not stated in the sealing work of the Holy Spirit at salvation. You cannot have the sealing of the Holy Spirit without faith. The church in Ephesus clearly had faith as he greeted them with the very greeting: “the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus.” Paul is going to build on the doctrine of faith throughout this letter and cover topics like the relationship of faith to grace (2:8), the boldness we have to approach God because of our faith (3:12), how faith makes us rooted and grounded in love (3:17), unity of faith (4:5,13), and faith as a defense against the lies of those who oppose us (6:16).

So Paul starts with the recognition of faith and moves towards the development of the outcome of that faith. This reinforces for us the idea that God is in the business of maturing us and growing us – rooted in the basis of our faith.

### Having Heard

*How did Paul hear about Ephesus and the other churches?*

As an apostle Paul had several mechanisms that he used for keeping aware of the various churches. He had written communications with various churches (witness the epistles we study), messengers from him, messengers to him, as well as his earlier missionary journeys that involved breaking new ground, but also circling back around to visit churches he or others had established earlier. No matter how Paul heard of their faith, he learned that they were established in faith.

## Having Heard of… Your Love of All the Saints

Not only was the church established, but they also loved the other churches – this is reflective of things like taking in believers as they passed through Ephesus, having shared the burden of others in need (like Paul’s collecting money for the Christians in Jerusalem) and prayer. No matter which reasons Paul was referring to, he had heard of these manifestations of God’s love in them.

## For This Reason, I Too… Do Not Cease Giving Thanks for You

### For This Reason

Paul’s having heard of their love for the saints because of their faith in Jesus led to the special apostolic care that comes out in this prayer.

### I Too

There is an implication from this construction that Paul is speaking of his prayers not being alone in this content. The Greek word Kago indicates a togetherness of purpose. This construction is also in Matthew 17:18 where Christ ‘kago’ sends in like manner. We don’t have a complete list of Paul’s entourage, but from the chronology of events in the scripture it likely to have included Tychicus and likely Luke (Acts 27:1 indicates he went to Rome with Paul). It may have also included other messengers and anyone else that had gathered with Paul during his imprisonment. It appears that some leading Jews in Rome became believers (c.f. Acts 28:24), and Philippians 4:22 tells us that the household of Caesar had been impacted by the gospel, likely through the centurion guard having been stationed to guard over Paul.

### Do Not Cease Giving Thanks for You

*Why is Paul thankful for the church in Ephesus?*

Paul recognized that the church in Ephesus was a critical part of his establishing of the church. Its location in trade, its importance within the Roman empire, and having an established Jewish population had made it important on his route, but his thankfulness was not for merely earthly political reasons. He knew that God had directed him there and had helped him establish the church there to preserve and expand the church in that region.

*What is required for thanks to happen?*

Thanks has several key things that need to be present to happen:

* A party that is benevolent
* A party that is a recipient
* The recipient needs to recognize the kindness expressed
* The recipient needs to express that thankfulness

While this may seem pedantic it’s worth noting that thankfulness is not always part of our thought-life. We may not always be aware of what is going on and through whom care is expressed, and we may not be thinking about our blessings.

Taking time to pause and reflect and pray we, too, can be like Paul: thankful for God’s provision to and through the body.

# While Making Mention of You in My Prayers

This clause of Paul’s sentence links both the earlier thoughts [subordinate clauses] about offering thanks in prayer to other thoughts on other specifics Paul prayers for them that carry on into verse 19a.

*Why is it significant that we make mention of others in prayer?*

Prayer for others is common throughout the whole Bible and is an expression of care and love taken before the author of care and love. It is a form of intercession – supplication on behalf of others – and it is something that the Holy Spirit does (Romans 8:26). It is reflective of a relationship between ourselves as well as a relationship and time for the Lord.

*Who is Paul Praying For?*

We learn in Ephesians 6:18 that Paul prays for all the churches and believers, and requests prayer from all believers on his behalf as well in 6:19. This doesn’t mean that Paul is without specific prayers for each church, but that in general his prayers for the churches are ongoing and consistent.

## That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ

*Why does Paul describe God the Father in more detail here in the midst of a prayer?*

Paul takes a moment to articulate some attributes of God as a teaching part of this letter. It is not merely God the Father – adequate in description – but a more complex description. Coming from a Hebrew background Paul would have been trained in the attributes of God ascribed to Him through specific names:

* El Roi – the God who sees (Genesis 16:7-16)
* El Shaddai – the God of More Than Enough (Genesis 48:3-4)
* El Olam – the everlasting God (Genesis 21:33)
* Jahweh Jireh – The God who provides (Genesis 22:14)
* Jahweh Rapha – the God who heals (Exodus 13:26)
* Jahweh Qadash – The God who sanctifies (Leviticus 20:8)
* Elohim Chayim – the God who lives (Deuteronomy 5:26)
* El Neeman – The faithful God (Deuteronomy 7:9)
* El Qodash – God the Holy one (Joshua 24:19)
* Jahweh Shalom – the God of Peace (Judges 6:24)
* Jahweh Rohi – The God my Shepherd (Psalm 23:1)
* Jahweh Tsidkenu - The Lord our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6)
* Jahweh Shammah – The God who is here (Exekiel 48:35)

When your understanding of God involves this list and then you realize that He chose you to be part of a body as described in verses 3-14 in this chapter *how could you not completely trust God and come before Him in supplication for anyone within the body?*

### The Father of Glory

As if the above list were not enough Paul’s description of God ties into the earlier reference in verses 6,12, and 14. Paul also mentions God’s glory specifically in Romans 6:4 and Philippians 2:11.

*What is God’s glory?*

God’s glory is classically defined as the radiant essence of His being. It signifies a showing of wealth, splendor, and is part of why we show fear and reverence to God. Paul is praying to a God who is infinitely wealthy – all creation belongs to Him – and can answer prayer with benevolent capability. Beseeching a weak, poor God would be absurd, but Paul is reminding his readers that this is not a false god or idol they’re praying to – it’s the God of glory!

### May Give You a Spirit of Wisdom

While we tend to think of ‘The Spirit’ or the Holy Spirit Paul is writing about a spirit, and this comes with the idea that there is an air or a sense of agreed upon living. He writes similarly in 1 Corinthians 4:21, Galatians 6:1, 1 Timothy 5:21, and 2 Timothy 1:7. In these places he is not referring to the Spirit (which he did in the verse 13), but a life that appears to be motivated by a sense of these qualities. For this manifestation to take place the Holy Spirit must be involved!

*What does a spirit of wisdom look like?*

A spirit or disposition of wisdom was critical at the time of this writing. The New Testament had not been completed and so the churches were forming and facing circumstances that were difficult (c.f. 1 Corinthians 5:1-5) and without the Old Testament Law in place how things should be handled in the church was complicated. Paul’s prayer for a spirit of wisdom was rooted in the desire for God to move through His church in a way that would squash carnal thinking about how to handle the needs of the body to the outcome of God’s glory and love being manifested amongst them.

### May Give You a Spirit of Revelation in the Knowledge of Him

*Why does Paul pray for a spirit of revelation?*

Further to the idea of a spirit of Wisdom Paul wanted the church to grow in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through special revelation. This idea was specifically in the context of not having a New Testament to read. Today we grow in the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ through His word.

# Conclusion

We’re half way through Paul’s prayer outline and we have seen that there’s a lot packed into why he’s praying, who he is praying to, and what the church in Ephesus needed. Today the church may not need the exact same special miraculous revelation, but we need the very same Holy Spirit to guide us in wisdom and revelation that we may know what is His will for us as we face a world that hates the gospel, does not understand the church, and wants us to be drawn away from the Father of Glory.

*What can we do to combat these things that would pull us away?*

*Who can we be praying for and how often?*

***Next: The rest of the prayer and the power of Christ’s being raised!***