

# The God to Whom We Pray

Ephesians 1:17

*Halifax: 14 October 2007*

## **Review:**

Last week in Ephesians 1:15-16,

- I showed you that the Apostle Paul had been stirred to give thanks to God and pray to Him for the Ephesians when he heard reports that they had faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all that saints.
- We saw how faith and love are the marks of those whom God has sealed with His Spirit to be partakers of all the marvellous blessings that Paul has been describing in verses 3-14—
  - In summary, these blessings include bringing us from our ruined sinful condition into the very fellowship of His eternal household!
    - He transforms us from sin and corruption to holiness and blamelessness,
      - redeems us through the very blood of Jesus so that all our sins are forgiven,
      - adopts us as His very own sons and gives us an inheritance in heaven with Jesus Christ,
      - and gives us the first fruits of this eternal inheritance by the Holy Spirit as soon as we are called.
- When Paul learned that the Ephesians were continually giving evidence that they had received the first fruits of this glorious inheritance...
  - When he heard that they had faith in Jesus and love for all the saints (which is the beginning of the future heavenly life)...
    - He was filled with thanksgiving to His gracious God!
      - Here was the Lord of all, acting just like Himself—being gracious to these Ephesians even as He had been gracious to Paul and so many others...
      - And seeing that He was indeed at work in these Ephesians had stirred Paul up to pray for them,
        - knowing that when God begins new life in a people through Jesus Christ, He will bring to those people the full blessings of salvation.
        - He will at last make them perfectly holy and bring them to live as sons and daughters in His house,
          - where they will revel in His matchless glory and enjoy pleasures forever more in His loving company.

- Paul was stirred to pray for blessing because he saw evidence in the Ephesians that God had chosen them for blessing.
- I exhorted you that you also ought to be stirred to pray for those in whom you see God at work—
  - knowing that He will complete the saving work that He has begun.

In future sermons,

- we are going to look at the details of the content of Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians...
  - It is recorded for us in verses 17-23.
  - But this week, I only want you to notice that his prayers for them are large prayers—prayers for great things!
    - He is praying that God would reveal Himself to them more and more,
      - that they would see His grace and beauty and perfections and glory...
      - that they would understand more and more what He has called them to obtain and the riches of the inheritance He has for them...
      - and that they would know the awesome power that is at work in them—the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead!
    - He is really praying here that the new heavenly life that has begun in them will increase!
      - That they will see God and live in the fullness of His grace and power!
      - It is a tremendous thing for which he asks!
- But how is it that Paul is able to ask such great things?
  - How is it that anyone is able to pray for such great things?
  - Well of course it is because he believes that God has promised to do all these things...
    - but still, this alone would not lead to great prayer unless he also has full confidence in God Himself.
    - Now this leads to my first point this morning:

## **I. Great prayer arises out of great thoughts of God.**

A. Paul prays for great things because he knows that he has a great God...

1. Look at how he describes Him in verse 17!

- He calls Him “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.”

- I am going to focus on this description of God that Paul gives us this morning.
2. This is no random description of God...
    - a. Paul has deliberately chosen to refer to God in this way because it relates to what he is praying about...
      - Because God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ who has passed into the realms of glory,
      - And because God is the Father of glory,
        - Paul is encouraged to pray for the blessing of God upon the Ephesians.
    - b. Describing God the way he does is the kind of thing you do when you recall certain titles of God that relate to what you are praying about...
      - For example, when you address God as “the Great Physician” when you are asking Him to heal someone...
        - or as the “God of all comfort” when you are praying for someone whose husband just died.
      - There is a definite connection between Paul’s description of the God to whom he prays and the content of his prayer...

TRANS> We will get to the details of Paul’s description of God later...

- but for now I want you to simply consider how much it helps to enlarge your prayers when you have an enlarged view of God.

B. You will pray for great things if you know that you have a great God...

1. Prayer is a weakness for us.
  - a. It is something we struggle with...
    - 1) Paul did too...
      - He often speaks of wrestling in prayer, striving in prayer, labouring to the point of exhaustion.
      - Real prayer requires real exertion.
    - 2) If you are doing more than perfunctory prayer—going through the motion of prayer...
      - it will be one of the most difficult things you ever do.
      - This is true even when you have enlarged views of God...

- b. But you don't even have a basis to begin praying until you have at least some sense of God's grace and power...
    - 1) Those who think God is weak or indifferent will be weak and indifferent in their prayers...
    - 2) And you can turn that around to say:
      - If your prayers are weak and indifferent, it is a sure sign that you have a low view of God.
      - You see, your theology is only as good as your prayers...
        - Sometimes I will meet men (it seems like it is usually men that are like this) who can go on and on about their theology...
          - they speak great things about God (and that is good of course as far as it goes)
          - but I have to conclude that they don't really believe what they are claiming to believe because it does not translate into fervent prayer!
2. You will say,
- "But there are times when I have prayed great things—
    - and they were not answered!
    - There were times when my heart was stirred with great thoughts of God and I have cried out to Him in great earnestness,
      - but there has been no response...
      - That has greatly discouraged me."
- a. Do you not know that Paul also had to struggle with unanswered prayer?
- 1) He prayed three times that the Lord would take away the thorn in his flesh—some sort of physical infirmity he bore...
    - it was not removed.
  - 2) He prayed most earnestly for the conversion of Israel
    - but he did not see it—his brethren according to the flesh continued to refuse the Lord Jesus.
      - only a remnant was saved.
  - 3) He prayed earnestly for the places he had ministered...
    - but many of them fell into terrible divisions and heresies.

- b. You must not have a name-it claim-it mentality as so many do today...
- 1) It seems that we are all revolutionaries!
    - We want the gospel to be a revolution that sweeps across the world and immediately transforms everything...
  - 2) But our Lord does not work that way...
    - He is not a revolutionary, but a reformer...
      - He brings about change over time through many struggles.
      - The kingdom of God comes through much tribulation and labour.
        - If anything witnesses to this, it is the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
        - He had to go the cross, and when He was raised, there was not a revolution such as the Jews expected of the Messiah...
          - but there was a gradual reformation...
          - The seed of the gospel slowly took root...
      - Kingdoms were not immediately overturned, but they were slowly changed from within.
        - You must remember that most of the churches that Paul planted were a lot like ours—
          - they were small and had little influence in the political arena.

TRANS> But even though there was no revolution, Paul continued to pray for great things for the churches.

- 3) The best prayer is not prayer that always looks for immediate answers or immediate relief...
  - a) I don't mean to say there is no place for such prayer...
    - You can have your little prayer book and record the date you began praying for something and the date that God answered it...
    - But if this is the only kind of prayer you are praying,
      - then there is something very deficient about your prayers.
  - b) If you look at the bulk of the prayers—the most important prayers—that are found in the scriptures,
    - they are prayers for reformation—
      - they are not things that you can record the date your prayer was answered in a little book...

- They are prayers like this prayer of Paul in Ephesians 1:17-23...
    - that the Ephesians would be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God and would know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...
    - They are prayers for the ongoing work of the kingdom—
      - for the leavening influence of the gospel in the world...
      - for the reformation of all things under Jesus Christ until all things are brought under His feet...
3. What you need is the prayer of faith!
- a. The prayer of faith is not so much the prayer that if I pray for \$100, I will get it tomorrow...
    - But it is the prayer that keeps on praying when there is no immediate answer because it believes that God is work even when it is not evident.
    - The prayer of faith is prayer that is prayed in light of who God is and what God has promised!
    - It is prayer that believes in Him and believes in His promises
  - b. There are so many examples of such prayer
    - 1) It is the prayer of Abraham that God would fulfil His promise to him, even though his wife was barren...
      - It is the prayer of Moses that God would deliver Israel from Egypt when he had already gone to Pharaoh and Pharaoh had hardened his heart and made things worse...
      - It is the prayers that Jacob and David and the prophets prayed in the darkest hours...
        - when the promise to Jacob was threatened by the approach of Esau...
        - when the promise to David was threatened by the unrelenting pursuit of him by Saul...
        - when the promise of restoration given by the prophets was threatened by the captivity...
          - and they continued to pray, not because they saw, but because they believed what God had promised.
    - 2) It is the prayer of Paul for Israel that he kept on praying even though he never saw it answered in his life time...

- 3) It is the prayer of Hugh Latimer when he was burned at the stake and turned his fellow martyr, Nicolas Ridley, and said,
  - “Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.”
  - Though his and Ridley’s life were being extinguished, Mr. Latimer knew that the gospel would not be extinguished.
  - He saw their death as the beginning rather than the end of a great work of God.

c. There are many struggles and disappointments in prayer...

1) There will be prayers for loved ones that are never converted...

- There will be prayers for healing that will never come...
- There will be prayers for particular churches that will seem to have little effect...

2) But all that God has promised will be done, and we need to see that He has promised a lot!

- The kingdom of God will come, and it will come gloriously to the earth!
- He will work in all those that are His and they will come into the fullness of the glory that He has promised—
  - and He will work in them all through the years to do the great things that He has promised.

TRANS> Brothers and sisters,

- Be encouraged to pray great things as Paul does for the Ephesians...
  - Be encouraged because of the God to whom you pray!
  - Let us now turn to consider specifically how Paul describes His greatness so that we will be strengthened to pray great things.

## **II. First, be encouraged that you pray to the God who is “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

TRANS> This is a rather unusual description...

- Jesus is Himself fully God...
  - How can Paul say that “God” is “His God”?

A. What does it mean for God to be the God of our Lord Jesus Christ?

1. These words refer to Jesus as the one who truly did come in the flesh...
  - a. He was fully human and so was, in his humanity, truly a creature under God.
  - b. This is seen in several ways:
    - 1) First, that He was subject to God as a man...
      - He was made under the law, subject to human laws including the ceremonial laws of Moses.
    - 2) Second, as man, he was dependent on God...truly so!
      - That is why we find Him praying...
      - That is why He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and did miracles by the Holy Spirit.
    - 3) Third, he worshipped as a man...
      - He worshipped God as His creator and admired Him and stood in awe of Him as every creature must do.
      - Understand that He never stopped being fully God Himself,
        - but that when He became man, He fully became man and continues to be both God and man for all eternity.
        - He is the Son of God who has no beginning and no ending...
          - But He is also the Son of Man who has God as His God as a creature...

TRANS> But this by no means exhausts what the Scripture means when it says that God is someone's God.

2. To have God has your God is to have His favour—to belong to Him—not merely as all creatures belong to Him, but as One who is His in a way that others are not His.
  - a. This is the very heart of God's covenant promise:
    - When He first came to Abraham to establish His covenant with Him,
      - He singled him out with these words:
        - "I will be your God."
  - b. Those words mean everything!
    - 1) To have God as your God means that you belong to Him as His own possession...
      - His own possession that He is going to take care of and bless...
      - His divine power is now directed toward blessing you.

- His own possession whose welfare is now tied together with His reputation so that if He doesn't bless you,
    - His reputation will suffer as one who does not take care of His own.
- 2) Jesus used the fact that God is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to demonstrate that there is a resurrection...
- stating as the proof of it that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living..."
    - If He is your God, you will live forever, for the people God possesses as His own cannot die.

TRANS> So when Paul says that God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,

- He is indicating that Jesus as man (as the one who walked in this world as one of us) was fully God's own, just as Abraham and every other believer is God's own.

3. But here is the great thing that is unique about Jesus...

- When Paul describes Him as one who has God as His God,
    - He does not speak of Him only as a private person,
      - but as "our Lord Jesus Christ."
    - Paul is saying that He is God's as "our Lord Jesus Christ!
- a. That is His full title as the Redeemer of His elect people!
- Let's look at the significance of each of the three names that are used of Christ.
- 1) As Lord, He is the One under whose rule we have come.
- He is our Lord because He has subdued us to himself so that we submit to Him—
    - He has turned our hearts to obedience when we were once lost in sin...
      - And He leads us in those ways that are pleasing to God.
      - We call Him Lord because we now follow Him.
  - Because God is the God of Him as our Lord,
    - that means that God approves of Him as our Lord...
    - It means that God receives the whole kingdom over which He rules.

- Because He is the God of the Lord of the kingdom, He is the God of the Lord as well as all the subjects.
- 2) As Jesus, He is the One who saves His people from their sins.
- The name Jesus means “Jehovah saves.”
    - This name was given to Him by God because He was the one who would save His people from their sins.
  - This, of course, was the great task that Jesus undertook...
    - He came to give His life a ransom for many
    - He came to die on the cross in order that all who believe might have the remission of sins.
      - He is *our Jesus – our Saviour*, if we are trusting in Him alone to take away our sins.
  - And “our Jesus” has God as His God...
    - That means that He is God not only to Him, but also to all those He has redeemed.
    - Because God has accepted Him, as our Saviour, He also has accepted all those who are saved by Him.
- 3) As Christ, He is the one God sent to be our Lord and Saviour...
- a) The word Christ means “the anointed one.”
- In the Old Testament, the word Messiah has the same meaning.
  - People were anointed in the Old Testament by pouring oil on them to show that God had set them over His people in an office...
    - Kings were anointed, priests were anointed, and prophets were anointed...
- b) But Jesus is *the anointed one*. He is *the Christ*.
- This means that God officially appointed Him to be Lord and Saviour of His elect...
    - That means that if He is our Lord and our Saviour, then we belong to God just as He does.
      - It means that as our Lord, He governs us so that we please God,
      - And it means that as our Saviour, God has fully accepted His offering for our sins.
  - In other words, because God is His God,

- God is also the God of all who are His.
- Because God accepts Him as Lord and Saviour, He accepts all those He came to save and restore.

B. Now this is a huge encouragement to our prayers!

1. Because God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,

- God is the one who is at work to bring about all that Jesus came to do for His people...
  - namely, to give us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places!

2. God is the God of this man who is our Lord and Saviour,

- and because He is His God, He is our God, powerfully at work in us even as He worked in Him.
- That is why Paul can say that the same power (God's power) that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to sit at His right hand is at work in us.
  - God almighty is co-labouring with the man, our Lord Jesus Christ, to bring about our salvation.

TRANS> Be encouraged, you pray to the God who is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- That is the first description Paul gives of the God to whom we pray...
- Now secondly:

### **III. Be encouraged, you pray to the God who is “the Father of Glory.”**

A. There are two ways to understand this title:

1. First, you may understand it to mean “the glorious Father.”

- This means that He is a Father that is full of glory as a Father...
  - much in the way that we might say that a great artist is a glorious artist...
- Of course it is very true that God is a glorious Father...
  - He is an eternal Father to God the Son, and now He has become our Father.
  - And He is all that a Father ought to be to His children...
    - He loves them
    - He guides them with absolutely wisdom
    - He is faithful
    - He gives good gifts to them
    - He provides all for them and for their true happiness...

- He is everything that a Father ought to be...
- He has all the perfections of fatherhood to a glorious degree!
- He is therefore a glorious Father.

TRANS> That's the first way to understand it...

2. The second way is as it is translated in the NKJV: that He is "the Father of glory."

a. This points to Him as the **source** of glory—

- This language is rather common in the scriptures...
  - In James 1:17, God is called: "the Father of light"
    - meaning that He is the producer of light...
    - All light comes from Him.
  - In 2 Cor 1:3, He is called: "the Father of mercies"
    - meaning that He is the originator of mercies.
    - All mercies come from Him.

b. To look at God as the Father of glory or the source of glory means that everything that is glorious comes from God...

- just as every good and perfect gift comes from Him.
- Glory is something very important to us as human beings...
  - We delight in glory—indeed, we live for glory!
    - There is glory in the works of our hands...
    - There is glory in our relationships...
    - There is glory in our art...
    - There is glory in a good meal, a good conversation, a good marriage, a good performance, a good day, a good vacation, a good movie, a good invention, a good view.
  - Without glory, we would not want to live...
    - and this description of God is saying that He is the source of all glory—
      - He is the fountain of every blessing that we enjoy.

3. So the question is, which way should we understand this phrase?

- Is God being described as "the glorious Father" or as "the Father of glory"?

a. Perhaps we don't have to choose one or the other.

- The translators are constrained to choose one or the other because we cannot duplicate the ambiguity of the original language in English...
    - but perhaps the best way to understand it is that God is a glorious Father and the source of all glorious things!
  - b. Both meanings are true to the rest of scripture, and both are rich in application,
    - so why not accept both!
- B. Consider how praying to God as the “glorious Father of glory” encourages us in prayer.
1. First, because as a glorious Father, He is very approachable and very caring...all that a Father ought to be...
    - a. Some people don’t like to think of God as a Father because they have such bad memories of their own fathers...
      - but you ought not to look at in that way at all...
      - No, even though your father may have been the opposite of what a father ought to be, he was still a father...
        - And as a father, he taught you what a father ought to be...
          - not by showing you what a father ought to do, but by showing you what a father ought not to do...
          - Those negative lessons, when sanctified by grace,
            - help you to know God as a glorious father by comparing Him to your father who is not glorious.
            - What your father should have been, God is, and much more!
    - b. That means that we can approach Him as our God and Father as One who will not be at all hesitant to hear our prayers...
      - and as one who will be delighted, in accordance with His wisdom, to do good things for His children—
        - for those like the Ephesians for whom we pray!
      - He will not growl at you and drive you away,
        - but He will greet you with warmth and affection as one who truly delights in you.
      - Jesus was so pleased with God as His Father—
        - He constantly spoke of Him with admiration and delight, and told He always wanted to please Him...

- He thought it was wonderful to be His Son.
- Well this is the Father whose children we are in Jesus Christ and this is the Father to whom we pray...
  - We still see Him through a glass darkly, but Jesus has told us about Him and we have every reason to trust Him...
    - If He paid so high a price to adopt us, and if His only Son loved Him so much that He was willing to die on the cross for us at His Father's command...
      - with what confidence ought we to come before Him in prayer with large petitions!

TRANS> But not only do we have good reason to come with confidence to Him as the one who loves us as a Father and will be pleased to bless us as His children...

2. But also as the one Who, as the Father of Glory, is able to bless us—and that in two ways:
  - a. First, He is able to bless us by making us glorious.
    - 1) We are promised all through the Bible that God will glorify us—
      - He will make us to be what we ought to be as human beings...
      - He will beautify us and perfect us...
      - Our bodies will no longer have corruption—there will be no more sickness and no more death...

TRANS> But much more than that,

- 2) We are told that God is renewing us into His image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.
  - Like Jesus, He is going to make us perfect likenesses of Himself!
    - Not that we will all be exactly the same, but as individuals, each will perfectly represent God.
    - Sin will be entirely eradicated.
- 3) And as God is the Father of glory, He is able to impart this glory to us—
  - We should come to Him with confidence to ask Him to do it!
    - Do you pray for His work in the church as Paul does?
      - Do you ask that He would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him?

- that as we are His children, He would educate us and train us and work in us to make us all that we should be and must be as His sons?
- or are your prayers often only for those things that you can record answers to in a prayer journal?

TRANS> Brothers and sisters, He is the Father of Glory!

- Make your prayers large!
- b. Second, as the Father of glory, He is able to bless us by supplying us with glorious things...
- 1) A good Father gives good gifts to His children.
    - God knows what will make most for our happiness, and even now He is preparing us for eternal happiness...
      - We are told that He is a God who delights in giving good gifts to His children.
      - In heaven, we will not only be glorified, but we will always be surrounded with glorious things—treasures and such...
  - 2) Above all, we will have the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit who give themselves to us...
    - and we will have our brothers and sisters who have been redeemed out of this world... given to us!
    - Even now, it is for us to pray for the perfection of this fellowship—
      - that we would have the fullness of God’s Spirit and enjoy communion with Him...
      - that we would see the glory of the Father and of His grace more and more...
      - that we would live together in a holy fellowship as His sons and daughters—
        - delighting in each other and in our elder brother Jesus Christ.

Be encouraged in your prayers my brothers and sisters!

- You have every reason to pray great prayers because you have such a great God!