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PAUL'S PRAYER THAT THE EPHESIANS LEARN BIBLE DOCTRINE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
NUMBER 3
EPHESIANS 1:15-17

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EPHESIANS 1:15-17 "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:"

Thus far in Ephesians, Chapter 1, we have been studying how millions of years ago God designed a plan for our lives and back there in eternity past made provision for our every need. The plan begins at the cross, when in a substitutionary death Christ took our place and paid for our sins. Because of this, we can enter the plan of God on a non-meritorious basis. This is the principle of Acts 16:31. Under the principle of grace, God does all the work in salvation and we merely receive the result of the work God has done for us. This plan of God, which was designed for us in eternity past has three phases.

Phase 1 is salvation. We believe on Christ and are saved.

Phase 2 is the believer in time. It begins at the point of salvation and continues until death or the resurrection, which ever one comes first.

Phase 3 is our life with God through all eternity.

Since God is perfect and his plan is perfect there is, therefore, no place for human good, no place for us to rely on human merit or ability. The work in salvation belongs in toto to God. We work after salvation and not to achieve salvation. In phase two, the period of our Christian living on this earth, two factors work in us--The Holy Spirit and the Word of God. In phase three, which we call eternity, all members of the Trinity take part and join together in accomplishing God's work. So in every part of the plan of God, man is the recipient and this is because of who and what God is. So there is a gap which has to be filled between God in eternity past and man who is living in time now.

In every life there are certain sufferings and troubles and heartaches and since there will be no suffering or death or sorrow in eternity, the only opportunity for God to demonstrate his love and power over these things is in time, while we live on this planet. That means that every believer will be blessed through sufferings and sorrows in time, and God will even take these things and turn them into blessings. This is the design of God, that from the very second you believe as a Christian until the time you depart this life, through every single experience in your life, you can have inner happiness and peace and poise. You can even be happy in defeat just as you are happy in victory. You can be happy during privation, just as well as being happy in times of prosperity. Even though circumstances change, the plan of God does not vary. Now sometimes we resort to crutches, such as using our friends or personal success or something else on which to lean. But man soon discovers that life is not dependent on circumstances but rather on the plan and purposes of God.

Marriage is a divine institution and has many benefits, but marriage was never meant to bring perfect happiness to man. Neither does wealth or fame or popularity bring perfect happiness. All of these things eventually bring problems and misery. So success and happiness is not determined by things. The details of life, no matter how wonderful, can't bring happiness. There must be something more than this in life. This brings to mind that phrase from the popular song--"Is that all there is?"

Now some people associate unhappiness and God and the church and the Sabbath. Sometimes we have made our Christianity so stale and dry and miserable that the outside world looks in at us and says, "No thank you. I don't care to have any of that kind of Christianity." Well, actually, nothing could be farther from the truth. This false interpretation of the Christian life has taught millions to have a false conception of the Christian way. Some believe that God is unhappy and in order to please him, we ought to be in a straitjacket on Sunday, hardly able to breathe, and if we are unhappy, then we please an unhappy God. But the truth is that God is perfectly happy, has always been and always will be. It is almost risky business to stop the average Christian and say to them, "How are you?" For more than likely they will begin to unload on you and you will almost wish you had never asked them anything before you get away from them.

Now keep this in mind--God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have been perfectly happy since eternity past and there has never been a maladjustment in the Trinity at any time. They have never had an essence kink since eternity past.

So the subject of Ephesians is this--God has designed a plan, a plan right in the midst of the Devil's world, where there is nothing but misery and sin and disappointment and poverty and war--but right at that same time, God has anticipated your every problem and had provided a solution for your every need. That plan is so perfect that it will provide for you perfect peace, perfect freedom and perfect happiness. Man has been given privacy and freedom and no one has a right to infringe on that freedom and no one has a right to infringe upon your personal rights. It is so wonderful to have the relaxed mental attitude of live and let live--mind your own business and leave others in the hands of God. Don't try to bully others and don't try to straighten out the business of every other single person in the universe.

Now how can God communicate his plan to man? Man has a very complex soul and the freedom given to man in creation was never given to anything else in all God's great creative scheme. Now there must be some way to link God's plan for man in eternity past and man as we find him today, and there is. That link between God and man is Bible doctrine.

Now in verses 1-14 in Ephesians 1 we have seen God's plan for man in the earth. So now the question that emerges is this--how can you get information into the soul of man so he can use God's great plan to the best advantage? It is one thing to know what that plan is, and quite another thing to be able to apply that plan. So now we have the missing link and it is now described for us in two apostolic prayers given in this Book of Ephesians. The first prayer is here in Ephesians 1:15-17. Paul here opened his mouth and prayed for these people. He didn't try to force his views upon them, and he didn't try to make something abnormal out of them, but he just prayed for them.

EPHESIANS 1:15 "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints," The word here translated "wherefore" is *dia* plus the accusative and should be "Because of which" or "Because of this." So it means this--Because of this perfect grace plan of God, because you have the grace plan of God in writing, because you have had perfect provision made for your every need since eternity past, then because of all this, you certainly should be able to live the abundant life.

So God concludes that we should be able to share in this perfect happiness of God. And the way to do this is to learn the formula for living and you do this by coming to know the Word of God. So the subject of this apostolic prayer from Paul is the importance of Bible doctrine.

Paul then said, "Having heard of your faith in the Lord" and this refers to faith rest. These people claimed the promises, doctrines and techniques of God's provisions. Then he referred to "their love for all the saints." This really means a relaxed mental attitude in their relationship with others. And this is produced by the filling of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22 says, "The fruit of the spirit is love..." And Romans 5:5 says, "That the love of God might be shed abroad in your frontal lobe by means of the Holy Spirit." So the words faith and love here used in Ephesians 1:15 describe these wonderful Christians in Ephesus. They were relaxed and happy and they were minding their own business. So the link between God in eternity past and man in the present is Bible doctrine. So if you are ever to know God and God's plan and God's will, you must come to know Bible doctrine. But so many of us have so much self-righteousness we actually think God put us here to try to straighten everybody else out. I have known some people who married certain individuals in order to try to straighten them out. Now where did we ever get the idea that we are the link between man and God? The link between man and God is Bible doctrine as found in the Word of God, and communicated by the Holy Spirit. So forget it if you think you can straighten out everybody in this city.

Remember, God says to us--"I am capable of evaluating everyone and I don't lose track of anyone. I have never lost track of even one believer. I will straighten out those who need to be straightened out." Please remember this--the Word of God liveth and abideth forever. And this is the basis for a relaxed, balanced Christian life.

EPHESIANS 1:16 "Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;" Paul was stimulated to pray for these people because they had inner happiness, a relaxed mental attitude, and they were not trying to mind everybody's business.

EPHESIANS 1:17 "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:" Now here we come to the content of his prayer. He is going to pray that these people will learn doctrine. The prayer began with God the Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now before you get the written word, you must have the Living Word. The cross always comes before doctrine. So he is called the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because he is the author of the plan which provided

the cross for our redemption. In eternity past Christ agreed to go to the cross and die for our sins. Christ called Jehovah both God and Father. When Christ was all alone and God forsook him and the Holy Spirit forsook him, Jesus cried out and said, "My God (addressed to God the Father), My God (addressed to God the Holy Spirit), why hast thou forsaken me?" So in this instance he called him "My God." But a few hours later after Christ had paid for all our sins, before he died he said, "Father into thy hands I hand back my human spirit" and then he died. So here he was back in fellowship and he called him "Father." Now these cries came from his humanity and these words were spoken from his humanity. So God is called "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and this refers to the cross. So the Living Word precedes the written Word. He is also called "The Father of Glory" and this refers to his ten essence characteristics in the essence box. He is the perfect Father and his plan is perfect and he gave us a perfect Saviour and also a perfect book. But the only way we could ever approach this perfection was through Jesus Christ. So "glory" here refers to the perfect character of God and he found a way through Jesus Christ for us to be saved. Salvation was provided for us long before we ever came to live on this planet. In other words, God provided our salvation birthday gift long before we ever had a birthday. And God still provides all things for us, even though he knew we would come and commit many sins. God knew we would rebel against his perfect character and yet he set in operation a plan whereby we might be saved.

"May give" is an aorist, active, optative. The aorist tense means that in the point of time called eternity past God provided these things for us and provided for our every need. This is a "link, aorist" and it means it links eternity past with our present needs, and we find we can supply them by learning Bible doctrine. In other words, Bible doctrine shows us that we can have a lamp for our feet and a light for our pathway. This is an aorist optative and means it is God's great desire to do this for us. He wants to give us "The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God unto every believer." The optative mood means that God is a gentleman and he will not force his doctrine upon us. He has provided perfect truth in Bible doctrine and he wants us to have it, but he is too much of a gentleman to force it on us.

Wisdom is the application of Bible doctrine from the spirit to the soul. Revelation is "apo kalupsis" and means to reveal from the ultimate source. Bible doctrine is revelation from the ultimate source. Knowledge of God leads to the Edification Complex and this is the knowledge that will make us self-sustaining. So Paul is here praying that the Ephesian Christians will grow into mature adult Christians by learning Bible doctrine.