

What Every Church Needs

Ephesians 1:15-20

January 26, 2020

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

“Bring the people together so I can tell them what I have to say. Then they will respect me as long as they live in the land, and they will teach these things to their children.”

God, Deuteronomy 4:10

INTRODUCTION

John Eldredge, in his book *Sacred Romance*, shares the pain of not belonging:

Being left out is one of life's most painful experiences. I remember the daily fourth-grade torture of waiting in line while the captains chose their teams for the kickball games. As each captain took turns choosing a player, descending from best to worst, our rank in fourth-grade society was



reinforced. Though others fared worse than I— “Don't make us take Smitty, we had him last time” — I was never the first to be chosen. No one ever said, “Wait — we get Eldredge this time!” I didn't feel wanted; at best, I felt tolerated. And then there was junior high cafeteria. After buying lunch, you carried your tray out into the dining room, looking for a place to eat. There was an unspoken hierarchy that determined where you could sit. I walked over to table filled with the “cool” kids, but before I could sit down, one of them sneered, “Not here, Eldredge, we're saving this for someone else.”

“These,” he says, “are some of the ways I learned the lesson that I was on the outside.”

Throughout our lives, each one of us lives with a constant nagging that we never quite fit in, we never truly belong. We've all had enough experience to teach us that we will never be allowed into the "sacred circle," the place of intimacy. ...

On the other hand, there is the joy of having someone save a place for us. We walk into a crowded room at church or at a dinner party and someone cares, he waves us over, pointing to a chair he's held on to especially for us. For a moment we feel a sense of relief, a taste of being on the inside. Now consider the words of Jesus to us — "I am going... to prepare a place for you."



But friends, even with this kind invitation of Jesus, the reality is that you cannot know someone well if you are not spending time with them. Intimacy develops as a result of close contact with someone over a period of time.

TEXT

Ephesians 1:15-20

PROPOSITION

A church which engages God's purposes will have an expanding love for God's people, a deepening understanding of God's nature, a broadening intimacy with God's person, and a growing trust in God's power.

EXPOSITION

1) We need an expanding love for God's people (1:15-16)

[15] This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, [16] I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

We bear a relationship with those who share our “faith in the Lord Jesus”. The church in Ephesus had a love “for all the saints”, and the Apostle Paul took note of their love for God’s people through prayers of thanksgiving. This love is the unconditional, sacrificial love that God Himself expresses toward us. It is a love that desires another’s highest good and does whatever is necessary to achieve that good. And note that their love was for “all” the saints – not just the saints that they enjoyed and appreciated!

I do not believe it is possible – except under rare circumstances – for one to say that they have love for Christ and faith in Him, and yet at the same time think that it is OK with God to distance one’s self from other Christians.

Nor is it God’s love to limit our relationships to a select and favored few while we shut others out. In practical terms, we show and prove our love for Christ by the manner in which we show love to those who also love Him:

Ephesians 5:25

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

While we may not agree on all matters with other Christians, our Savior is very much interested in how we relate to those who name the Name of Christ as Savior and Lord. Christ loves the church, He died for the church, He laid down His life and gave Himself up for the church.

How can we possibly withdraw ourselves from the church or become critical of the Church, which is the Body of Christ?

1 John 3:23 (New Living Translation)

...this is His commandment: We must believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

1 John 4:20-21 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

[20] If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar.

For the person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. [21] And we have this command from Him:

The one who loves God must also love his brother.

Why should we waste our time attacking those who love our Lord whose theology may not mesh perfectly with our own? Why do we criticize other Christians in full view of the world? What is the world supposed to think when they see this happening? Such arguments do nothing for those who are held in slavery to sin. Remember what Jesus said:

John 13:34-35

[34] “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. [35] By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

1) We need an expanding love for God’s people

2) We need a deepening understanding of God’s nature (1:17)

[17] I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.

The Apostle Paul was praying that the Christians in Ephesus would have the Spirit of wisdom. The word Paul uses for “wisdom” (SOPHIA) refers to the deep things of God. In other words, Paul is praying that the Ephesians would be led deeper and deeper into the eternal truths of God. The end result is that we would be able to properly apply our knowledge of God and His will to our daily circumstances.

There are three very important steps we must take in order to gain a deepening understanding of God’s nature:

a) We must have a desire to learn of God. We should be continually engaged in a pursuit of the knowledge of God. Our goal is to know Him better and better as time goes on. Since God has chosen to make Himself known through written revelation, it is very important that we set our minds to the study and thorough examination of all that God has chosen to tell us about Himself.

b) We must learn to properly handle God’s revelation. The word “revelation” refers to the act of uncovering that which was previously hidden from view. Revelation is “taking the lid off” and bringing into plain view something which was hidden, secret, unknown, or undisclosed to us earlier. The explanation and teaching of God’s Word in the pulpit must clearly communicate God’s revelation – no more and no less. We must declare what is necessary, not what is merely convenient for us to follow or easy on our ears. Our teachers must be fully prepared to explain the meaning of scripture and engage the student in applying God’s Word to daily living. And the Christian should become skilled in learning how to feed one’s own soul through regular and consistent interaction with the Word of God.

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Hebrews 5:14

...solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

c) We must distinguish between the essential and the non-essential.

Sometimes our discussions and concerns can get wrapped up in matters that really make little difference as far as God, a world dying in sin, and the eternal truths of God's Word are concerned. We've got to keep the main thing, the main thing, as Jesus taught.

Priority Number One is love for God:

Mark 12:29-30 (New Living Translation)

[29] Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. [30] And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'"

Priority Number Two is love for our neighbor:

Mark 12:31 (GOD'S WORD Translation)

"The second most important commandment is this: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

Priority Number Three is love for the world:

Matthew 28:19-20 (New Living Translation)

[19] Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. [20] Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Once we have the Great Commandments and the Great Commission taken care of, then we can move on to spend our time on lesser concerns.

We must use our time wisely, being able to recognize the differences between matters that are truly important and those that are not nearly so important.

Warren Wiersbe writes that the goal of Paul's prayer for believers is that we...

...know God personally in salvation:

John 17:3

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

...know God increasingly in sanctification:

Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...

...know God perfectly in glorification:

1 Corinthians 13:12

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

2) We need a deepening understanding of God's nature

3) We need a broadening intimacy with God's person (1:18)

[18] I pray that the perception of your mind may be enlightened so you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints...

“Hope” in the Bible is different from the way we usually use the word. We usually use “hope” as a stronger word for “wish”. We “hope” we will win the McDonald’s Monopoly Game grand prize; we “hope” it will be sunny the day we plan for a picnic; we “hope” we get the job for which we applied. But when Paul uses the word in this phrase, he is not talking about a vague wish for the future. He is talking about something concrete – something definite – something that is in the future, but is solid and reliable in the present. Here particularly it is the hope of the calling of God. And His prayer is that we might know this hope in our hearts

Have you ever been by the bedside of an elderly Christian man or woman who was facing death with this knowledge of the hope of the calling of God? There is a peace, an assurance, a confidence in their knowing. The eyes of their hearts are open, and they know the certainty of the hope of God's calling.

Paul also prayed that they would know "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints". The New Testament uses the word "saints" to apply to all of God's people. God's inheritance is us. Now look at how we are described – "riches of his glorious inheritance". We are God's inheritance, and He looks at us as "rich and glorious", and Paul's prayer is that you and I would know it. Not just know it in our heads, but know, deep in our hearts, that God views us in a way that we could never imagine. He looks upon us and sees richness and glory, and He treasures us as His inheritance.

Why does Paul pray that we might know this in our hearts? Because if we know this in our hearts, we will begin to live more like it, striving to live up to our calling out of gratitude to God. We don't obey God out of a desire to become good enough for God to love and accept – we obey out of a settled conviction that God sees us as His highly valued, rich, glorious children, and because of this we have a desire to live up to God's view of us.

When you and I know who we are in Christ, when we really know in our hearts that we are loved and valued and accepted by God, we are truly free. Free from "performance Christianity", free from striving to earn God's love. We are God's inheritance.

And if this is our reality, then it is important that we are experiencing a broadening intimacy with God Himself. Knowing God is not a matter of religious ritual, rigorous rule-keeping, or pursuing a righteousness that is by our own effort. Knowing God is a matter of *relationship*. And this relationship began when we placed our faith and trust in God's Son.

The question that we need to address is not "Are you observing the rituals of Christianity?" It is not "Have you kept the rules and regulations to the best of your ability?" It is not "Have you been doing your best to maintain your standing (or appearance, perhaps) as a Christian?" The question we need to address is, "How is your relationship with God?" Are you at home in God's presence, and is God at home in your heart? The intimacy of our relationship depends on the time we spend with Him and the conversations we have with Him, too.

3) We need a broadening intimacy with God's person

4) We need a growing trust in God's power (1:19-20)

[19] I pray... that you may know... what is the immeasurable greatness of His power to us who believe, according to the working of His vast strength. [20] He demonstrated this power in the Messiah by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavens...

This is the power that raised Christ from the dead. This is the power that placed Him in the seat of authority over the entire universe. This is the power that God is prepared to make known in the life of the Christian. This is the power that will enable us to see great things accomplished for Christ's Kingdom in the months and years ahead.

Paul notes that God's power is "immeasurably great". God's power goes far beyond all other power. When God's power is exercised in the life of the Christian, it is impossible for that Christian's spiritual enemies to overwhelm him. As the Apostle John noted, "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

And this is a continually surpassing power! There will never be a day when it is not sufficient to accomplish what God purposes in us, and through us, and for us!

PROPOSITION

A church which engages God's purposes will have an expanding love for God's people, a deepening understanding of God's nature, a broadening intimacy with God's person, and a growing trust in God's power.

APPLICATION

And here is what we are needing as a church in order for us to succeed:

1) We need an expanding love for God's people

2) We need a deepening understanding of God's nature

3) We need a broadening intimacy with God's person

4) We need a growing trust in God's power

I want to encourage us in the coming days to relate to one another with an open hand of selfless giving – giving of our resources, our time, our efforts, our prayers, our involvement, our participation.

Loving one another in our endeavors in such a way that others will have opportunity to take note that God is at work in our midst.

Let's allow the matters that are of great importance to God to be important to us as well – Love for God, love for neighbor, love for the world.

Let's do everything we can to broaden our intimacy with God in a relationship that is deepening and growing continually over time.

The primary means by which our spiritual enemy, Satan, will seek to bring defeat in our lives and in our endeavors will be to somehow separate us from God and hinder the expression of our relationship with Him.

Let's have a growing trust in the power of God to perfectly accomplish what He calls us to do. If God is in it, it cannot be stopped. If God is in it, there is nothing to fear. If God is in it, it's as good as done. Christ will build His Church, and not even hell itself can stand in His way.