



The Grand Plan of the Glorious God, That We Might Know God

Series: The Most Remarkable Run-On in Holy Writ

Ephesians 1:15-23

August 1, 2010

Pastor Nick Shaffer

Introduction

How do you follow up this amazing theologically rich sentence? Prayer that the congregation understands the depths of it. Before he prays, however, he expresses praise to God. Paul is excited to pray for Ephesians and he is excited to pray for them because in his words, "I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints." Paul's delight, when it comes to the Ephesians, can be summed up in one word, "authenticity."

Paul's Praise for Their Authenticity (Eph 1:15-16a)

First, Paul gives thanks to God for the authenticity of their faith. Interesting -- It was Paul who first took the gospel to the Ephesus and preached to its citizens and saw many converts as a result of his ministry. He saw their conversion, many of them, first hand. So what is Paul saying here? While he is in prison Paul is rejoicing and thankful that the reputation of the Ephesians church has reached his ears and the reputation is that they are God followers.

That excites Paul because it means that not only had they made a profession of faith in Christ, they were continuing in it; they were walking with Christ; they had continued believing and growing deeper in their walk with Christ; their faith was bearing fruit. That was a delight to Paul's soul. Theirs was not what I call a revival decision. Revival decisions are those emotionally driven, guilt ridden confessions of faith that last a month or so and dry up. They never have any real root. But the faith of the Ephesians was authentic and as a result their reputation had reached the ears of Paul.

They had a real, substantive, vibrant faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. There are many humanly good people, moral people who are not Christians, people with vague, general, idealistic nice thoughts. Conservative does not equal Christian. For a faithful follower of Christ, for a true Christian, the words, "faith in the Lord Jesus" mean that he or she has no faith in his or herself, that he or she has come to see that all his righteousness is as filthy rags, refuse, useless, worthless. He has no confidence in the flesh to make himself acceptable to God, no confidence in himself, he relies entirely and utterly on the Lord Jesus Christ and His work on His behalf to be saved from the wrath to come. To have faith in the Lord Jesus means that you trust Him

entirely and absolutely as the Son of the Living God, the sovereign Lord over creation and your life, the only wrath-bearer for your sin. It means you believe that as Savior of sinners He came into the world to deliver you and as the Lord of all power he accomplished it. Faith in the Lord Jesus means that I cast my entire hope upon Him and what he has done on my behalf; I am a hopeless and lost sinner and I am saved only because of Jesus' blood and righteousness. To have faith in Christ is to have a life in which your entire outlook is centered in Him. He is the beginning and the end of everything. He is Lord. The evidence of this kind of faith was everywhere in their lives. It was observable in their life.

Authentic faith shows itself in authentic love. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."** (John 13:34-35 ESV) Faith and love go together.

One presupposes the other. If you have faith in Christ, and you are submitted to Him as Lord and Savior and you are abiding in Him, then it's going to have an outflow. True faith overflows in love to the people of God.

What is this love that we're talking about? The word is *agape*. It refers to the kind of love that is intensely committed to one's spiritual best. It is a kind of love that is not simply sentimental or emotional, but an act of the will. It manifests itself in care, compassion, commitment... It comes from the work of the Spirit of God in our hearts. It's totally unlike anything the human flesh can produce.

It is a love that is to all the saints. A true Christian does not pick and choose which of the brethren they will love. There are certainly people that we are more attracted to with likes and dislikes, age, common backgrounds, etc. But we are to love all the saints. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. This sort of love is not fickle. It is steady and persevering. If we rephrased this passage in terms of positive actions concerning love we might come up with a list like this:

I am patient with you because I love you and want to forgive you. I am kind to you because I love you and want to help you. I do not envy your possessions or your gifts because I love you and want you to enjoy God's best. I do not boast about my attainments because I love you and am not seeking to magnify myself above you. I am not proud because I love you and want to esteem you before myself. I will not gossip about you because I love you and I don't want to injure you. I am not rude because I love you and care about your feelings. I will not be continually questioning your motives because I love you and I want to believe the best about you. I will confront you when you are sinning. Because I cannot rejoice in evil, I will rebuke you gently or roughly when I have to, reasoning with you from the Scriptures because I love you and I want you to be holy before God so that He may bless you. I am not self seeking because I love

you and want to meet your needs. I am not easily angered by you because I love you and want to overlook your offenses. I do not keep a record of your wrongs because I love you, and “love covers a multitude of sins.”

It works like this. I love my brothers and sisters in Christ because they have the same relationship with God as I have -- chosen by God and adopted into His family. Together we are walking through this world of sin toward heaven and I am going to spend eternity with them; we are all moving toward the inheritance of eternity in the glory of Heaven rejoicing in the glory of our God because of God’s amazing love for us in Christ. I don’t deserve it; they don’t deserve it. But if I love God I must love my brethren because how can I love the God whom I have not seen if I do not love the brothers and sisters in Christ that I can see. That is the kind of love that Paul saw in the Ephesian church when He wrote to them. They were the real deal. They had a real faith and they acted in real love.

Paul’s reaction is thankfulness. He knew what kind of people they were before the gospel was preached to them. Paul knew what they were unmistakably a work of God through the Holy Spirit. It is out of this thankfulness to God for their strong faith and love that Paul makes this passionate petition and prayer.

Paul’s Passionate Petition and Prayer to Know Him (Eph 1:16b-17)

To know God...Now what is the gist of His prayer? What does Paul desire for the Ephesians to whom he has written? It is knowledge of God. He wants them to know God. Paul is praying for them the most important prayer that any believer can pray for another. That God would take them deeper and deeper into a more intimate knowledge of Him.

That is a pretty big contrast to how we pray. We usually pray for felt needs, for things that we can see. We pray for symptoms. Follow with me in what I am saying. We might pray for someone to become more loving. We spend time praying for people to quit certain destructive behaviors. We pray for them to be better fathers or mothers; we pray for people to stop lying, to be better stewards, to master their tempers, etc.. Now I am not denigrating those prayers, they are legitimate prayers, but what we are doing is praying for the symptoms and not the root need. Paul has the root need in view here. He is praying that the Ephesians would know God more deeply. That is the real need. It becomes clear when you understand the concept behind the word that is translated as knowledge.

It is the Greek word “epignosis.” It is a compound word that means intimate knowledge. It means more than just knowing the facts. Paul has already given them the facts concerning God and their relationship to Him. He says, "Now I want something deeper for you. I want you to know God. I want you to have a deeper understanding of God." Epignosis means to not only know God but to experience God, to be influenced and directed by God. It is the idea drawn into God Himself and not just the facts about Him, and when that happens is when real, lasting, deep seated transformation takes place. Epignosis is such a powerful term. It is not casual, cursory acquaintance. It is not superficial knowledge, but profound knowledge that shapes and changes you. Paul wants God to be real to us, that we would be conscious of Him always, conscious of His presence.

We desperately need to know God and the reason that need is so desperate is that we often settle for far less. Some of us settle for **little knowledge**. We want to go to heaven ignorantly. We don't want to wrestle with the truth of God, or think God's thoughts after Him, or feel deeply about the true God. We want the minimalist approach to God. Some settle for **mere knowledge of the Bible**. Knowing God's word is good and there is no truth apart from the Word of God so we need to know Scripture but that in and of itself is not the fullness of what God has for us. Some settle for **knowledge about God**. They can discuss the attributes of God and have a great handle on theology, but it is possible to know a great deal of theology and not know God. Christianity is not merely head knowledge. This book is given so that we may know the living God, to know his love, his wisdom, his strength, his might and to know it all personally. **And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (Joh 17:3 ESV)**

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians and my prayer for us, for you and me, is that we might know God more deeply, more fully, more completely, that we might long to know Him, that we would desire Him. Because knowing God and having God is our deepest need. You know, I could talk about knowing God all morning, defining and explaining the terms but sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words and it is in this case. Let me show you from the OT what it looks like to know God. Look at Psalm 63.

A Picture of A Heart that Knows God – Psalm 63

(Psalms 63:1) A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. The background of Psalm 63 is very important to understanding the Psalm. David was in the midst of severe persecution from Absalom who had rebelled against David's rule. In 2 Sam 15:13, we learn that "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." And therefore, David flees into the Judean wilderness. There he suffered thirst, hunger, pain, loneliness, and exhaustion. There in the

desert David had many needs, yet David lets us know that none of these are his biggest need. His next words tell us what his biggest need is.

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Right away we see that David is not first of all seeking food, water, comfort, or rest – even though he is in the desert and badly needs all of these things. What David hungers and thirsts for above anything else is God. David seeks to be fully satisfied in God alone. David is searching for a deep communion with the Lord.

David says, you are my God, but he doesn't stop there. **Earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.** What is the deal? Isn't David already saved? What's all this seeking stuff? Well, thankfully David was not a modern church member who has heard the modern idea of "walk an aisle, pray a prayer, sign a card and you are good to go." He was not snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that we only need God for a moment. David did not conceive of salvation, did not conceive of a relationship with God as a sterile transaction, as some acceptance of certain facts regarding God's mercy and the offer of forgiveness, not some sterile intellectual thing. That is not the testimony of the word of God nor of the multitudes of saints that have come before us. Salvation to David was deep, personal knowledge of God and of His grace. Seeking God was the very center of David's life. David wanted to know Him. There are longings in us that can only be filled by God Himself.

We seek after money and power because they give us a sense of security. But it is only in knowing the God who gives total security, we will ever be satisfied. We seek after friendship, but only in knowing God will our need for fellowship be filled. We seek affirmation and approval from other people, but God has made us to be satisfied only when we have the approval of God. We are addicted to sex and relationships because we are starved for intimacy. But it is only in knowing God, we find true intimacy for our souls. We are always looking for entertainment and for the release and rest that comes with it, but it is knowing God, we find the rest that comes only from the presence of God. This is life. Knowing God is life.

David understood that and that is why he describes his desire for God in such striking and picturesque language. **My soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.** Have you ever been thirsty? I mean, really thirsty. The kind of thirst where nothing can satisfy you except water... Satisfaction will never come if we claim to have God, but then try to quench our souls on the short-lived, inadequate pleasures of this world...

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. (v. 2-4) That is the language of a worshipper. David had been in His temple and he had experienced the power and the glory of God. God had known, had experienced the greatness of knowing God.

“Because your steadfast love is better than life”-What is David saying here? Because he had experienced his steadfast, immovable, unfailing love, he will praise Him. Only God himself can satisfy the craving of a soul really awakened by the Holy Spirit. David knew that and Paul knows that and that is why He is praying for the Ephesians to know God more and more.

And what was the result of David’s seeking and unabashed worship? Satisfaction. **My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food. (v.5)** Here’s what David is saying. Imagine your favorite meal, not what your diet will allow. What is it? For some of the kids, it is Five Guys, but for the more sophisticated, what are you imagining? Some of you adults may be thinking about a rib eye steak. Others may be thinking about fresh cooked Alaskan king crab. Now, I want you to think about dessert -- totally satisfied in your feast. Now, take this imagery and translate it into finding pleasure in God. David writes, **"My soul is satisfied as with fat and rich food."** There is, in knowing God, a richness, a sumptuousness, a fullness of soul filling joy, comparable to the richest food with which the body can be nourished.

and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; (v.5b-6) It is a feast that never ends. As the day wound to a close David was still celebrating and seeking after his God. He used even that time to remind Him of God’s goodness to him. Look at what he says:

For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. (v.7) David did not waste his capacity for memories, but instead made them his servant to furnish him with proofs of God’s faithfulness, and to lead him to a growing confidence in Him. David found joyous shelter in his God as David sought God with all his heart. Then this declaration:

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (v.8) Literally David was saying, “I am stuck on you. I am glued to you Lord. I am never letting go.” You know what this looks like. My son Gabe practices this on a daily basis. It is in our arms that he is secure. That is the heart of David here. God is his portion and his security and he is not letting go but will continue to seek him with all earnestness of heart, knowing the future grace that awaits him: **But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped. (v. 9-11)** Amen. David

found the satisfaction that most glorifies God in his God alone. He found his greatest delight in pursuing God.

Do you have that burning heart for God? To that end, Paul prays that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and of revelation. What this Greek phrase is emphasizing is the concept of illumination. If we are to know God more fully, He must reveal Himself. What Paul is praying for the Ephesians is for something that only the Holy Spirit of God can give. What he is praying for simply, is the Holy Spirit's help and continued unction in bringing to these faithful believers ever greater wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God, but we must pursue knowing Him.

We have to fight to know God. This is a greater challenge for us in the days in which we live than ever before. We simply don't know what it means to really know anyone anymore. There are many factors that have contributed to this but I want to emphasize two that I think have done the most damage. First is the sexual revolution. We have taken a gift of God, the gift of spiritual intimacy in marriage and we have reduced it to the level of a physical function like breathing or a pastime like running or working out. Technique crazy... We have taken that which is a sacred spiritual expression of knowing our wife or husband, an expression of being one flesh and have cheapened it into a physical experience only and that has grave effects on our understanding of knowing someone. Done the same with God...not intimacy but techniques.

Moreover, we live in the age of social media and all that has led up to it. We can be "friends" with someone we have never laid eyes on, of who we know nothing and share nothing. Just hit a button, find out their profile and -- voila! -- you are friends. All that does is cheapen friendship. In reality, many of our friends on Facebook have value to us because they are a ready-made audience for our inner Toby Keith -- "I wanna talk about me..." In days past, knowing someone required writing a letter, riding on horseback, walking sometimes -- it required more of us, it required investment. Now, we just hit a button and it's done.

Knowing God is something more. It is a matter of **personal dealing** with Him. You cannot know God through someone else. There are no go-betweens, and there is only one mediator, Jesus Christ. You need to deal with Him personally to know Him. Knowing God is matter of **personal involvement** in mind, will, and emotion in a relationship with the Lord. You have a personal stake in the relationship. It cannot be haphazard or unintentional. Knowing Him is a matter of **grace**. It is a relationship in which the initiative is taken by God. It is initiated by God, empowered by God, and made possible by God. Knowing God is the gateway to the abundant life. We need to remember that. We must pray this prayer for one another, to pray for the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination of the person of God through the Word, through worship, through prayer, through everyday life so that we would really know Him. And this is so

important, because none of us ever will know God too much, and none of us in this life will ever know enough about Him. And the more we know Him, the more we will love Him, the more we will praise Him, the more we will be like Him -- to love the things that He loves, to hate the things that He hates, to bear witness of Him in word and life? All of that is wrapped up in knowing Him.

Do you know God? I am not asking whether you believe things about Him; but have you met Him? Have you known yourself for certain in His presence? Do you thirst for God? It is my prayer for you, to know God. Are we willing to lay down other goals in our lives in order to pursue the highest goal of all, that of developing and deepening our intimacy with God until we can truly say that we know Him - until we are captivated and absorbed by Him and passionately in love with Him? For this is our primary calling, the one from which the call to glorify God springs. I am praying that for you...please pray that for me.

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2010

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.