

Q&A: The Issue of Prayer and God's Response

By Jeremy Lucas

Question: How does God answer prayer and how is He working in our lives today?

Some of the most gracious and kindhearted believers in the "movement of grace" are those who have stepped beyond the intellect and doctrine of the Pauline epistles (albeit, not forgetting intellect and doctrine) and stepped into the realm of a Pauline life, heart, and walk. When we ask the question, "What is God doing today," we tend to say this in relationship to what He is or is not accomplishing within our lives personally. And part of the reason we ask this question is because we want to know that He truly does CARE about who we are. We want to know that He has not simply granted us His grace and never again touches our lives. For to know a God that does NOT care in that way is to experience a childhood abandonment (by a Father who adopted us, and then walked out on us). Hence, we ask the question, "What is God doing today?"

Intellectually, we derive all kinds of educational and doctrinal straight lines about the way God is, the way He operates, or the things He has stopped doing in this age. But that last one is the most consequential in our movement. For when we talk extensively about what God is NOT doing today, we fail to exhibit, speak on, or discuss the things that He IS doing.

The approach I'm intending to use is one that allows for all viewers of this thread to consider this answer Biblically. Having watched the growth of G.R.A.C.E. Ministries for some time now, I've seen that we have many who believe in the idea that the church began in Acts 9, many who believe that it began in Act 13 and many who believe it began after Acts 28. Part of the dilemma we run into with that wide range of beliefs is that some will end up looking at certain Pauline epistles as non-applicable (as in, they were written before Paul began preaching to this dispensation) and therefore do not weigh in on our present day circumstances. These "early epistles" then become an ineffective proof-text when speaking about matters of doctrinal significance or other matters. So what I'm going to do tonight is something that alleviates all questionable data, yet still uses Pauline material.

Meaning what?

We're going to look at some of the very last books that Paul wrote before his race was completed. We're going to look at some of the very last words he wrote that displayed his passion, his heart, and the things that God IS doing.

We're going to look at the upside of God's movement, not the misrepresented downside of His abandonment. And we're going to see it in SIX of Paul's final letters. From here on out, I ask that you sit down, get comfortable, and begin considering what God is doing today...

1. Today, God is providing peace to those who are in Christ Jesus.

"Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 1:2

How often do we see this phrase in an opening of Paul's letters? "Grace and peace." We certainly know that grace is the thing by which we're saved, but what is peace? Is it an automatic constant that one receives when they are saved? I certainly don't have it all the time.

The word for peace here is the Greek verb, *eirene*, which means "quietness, rest, stillness." Is this a state of being that we are always in automatically? Surely not. The people of God have always called upon the Lord for this peace. And that calling is no less valuable today. Remember the famous quote from Scripture...

"Be still, and know that I am God:" Psalm 46:10a

This is, of course, just a few words taken from a time of exclamation about the future of Israel, but the implication that God gives to Israel is that they BE still. An action of being still. An action of being quiet.

In the rush of this busy world, have you ever noticed how much more your focus on Christ regains momentum when you are still? What about when you take a moment to pause, smell the air, or look up into the sky? The peace of God is not only something we seek, but it's something He gives. And didn't just GIVE it 2000 years ago. He gives it today!

2. Today, God is providing His Spirit of wisdom.

"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:"
Ephesians 1:15-17

Let's immediately dispel two rumors of dispensationalist philosophy.

The first being that God does not provide anything today that He did not provide 2000 years ago on the cross. When the Apostle Paul prayed, he was praying for the hearts and lives of those who were already believers in the cross of Christ (Eph.1:13). These words, these prayers, and these issues of God's doing were not pre-salvation matters. These were post-salvation works of God.

Secondly, the other rumor often expressed is that the only thing a believer NEEDS in his or her life is to know of the cross and to have the Scriptures available. While the cross and the Scriptures are the two ESSENTIAL pieces that make up a strong, firm, foundational Body member, the Scriptures themselves offer LIFE that if only read and understood... means nothing. One cannot claim to speak of the LIFE that is offered in Christ Jesus and then in the same sentence, claim that God does nothing today in the life of a believer.

Having dispelled those two things, let's go back to this "spirit of wisdom" that Paul asks the Lord to give his readers.

We know that the "mind of Christ" is ours already on the basis that we are in Christ, but part of the reason that we HAVE that mind of Christ is because of the Holy Spirit.

"For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." I Corinthians 2:11-12

But here's the problem. How much do we know, at present, from our time even as theologians, students, or seekers of the truth about the Holy Spirit that's inside of us? How much do we know about Him? Certainly we know the basic factors... that He seals us (Ephesians 1:13) and that He is able to be grieved by our very nature (Ephesians 4:30). But these are basic, intellectual things that we've learned since we first became Bereans. What of the ENTIRETY of the Holy Spirit? Who is He? What is He?

If the Lord our God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are ONE, then we must believe, without question or doubt, that the descriptions both past, present, and future that define the Holy Spirit are complete, perfect, and available for our understanding. Even those things that describe the Holy Spirit pre-dispensation-of-grace are still the Holy Spirit. Especially when they speak of Him in an objective sense of character. So let's look backwards and forwards to something that might enhance Paul's prayer that his readers might receive the "spirit of wisdom."

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood," Revelation 1:4-5

Believe it or not, at first glance, you should be able to see an extensive vision of the three-fold person of God.

1. He which is, which was, and which is to come... The Father.
2. The Seven Spirits which are before His throne... The Spirit.
3. Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness... The Son.

John illustrates a very unique, but often overlooked character of the Holy Spirit. For He who seals and grieves (as we know from Ephesians) is not solely a "sealer" or a "griever." In fact, the Holy Spirit isn't within Himself, EITHER of those things. They (the sealing and the grieving) are simply actions that He does as a result of other means of His character. Here we see John describing the Holy Spirit differently than just "the Holy Spirit." Rather, we see the Holy Spirit described as "the Seven Spirits." Where else do we find a description like this to define the Holy Spirit?

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;" Isaiah 11:1-2

In a prophecy of the coming Messiah, the rod of the stem of Jesse, the Branch of his roots, we see that the "spirit of the Lord" (i.e... the Holy Spirit) will rest upon Him.

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:" Matthew 3:16

Isaiah prophecies that the "Spirit of the Lord" will rest upon this Branch. Matthew describes it actually happening. And when this Spirit rests upon the Branch, what does Isaiah say that the Spirit IS?

"And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;" Isaiah 11:1-2

1. The Spirit of the Lord (not just any spirit)
2. The Spirit of Wisdom
3. The Spirit of Understanding
4. The Spirit of Counsel
5. The Spirit of Might
6. The Spirit of Knowledge
7. The Spirit of the Fear of the Lord

All of these are internal aspects that cannot be SEEN. When Christ rose up from His baptism that day, no one SAW wisdom in Him. No one SAW knowledge in Him. No one SAW might in Him. These things were internalized through the Holy Spirit.

That IS the Holy Spirit. John's mention of the "Seven Spirits" is not an allusion to any random spirits that happen to be there, they are a mention of God Himself in seven forms of His Spirit.

Returning to Ephesians 1:17, we remember that Paul is praying that the Spirit of wisdom will be given unto his readers. But don't they have the Holy Spirit sealing them? Absolutely! Hasn't the Holy Spirit already become a dweller in their lives? Absolutely! So why would there be any need of praying for an aspect of the Holy Spirit to be given? Because the Holy Spirit is ALIVE! Because the Holy Spirit is ACTIVE! Because the Holy Spirit is ABLE to give!

3. Today, God is providing knowledge through the Holy Spirit.

"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:" Ephesians 1:17

More of a continuation from the previous point, but wisdom increases upon also receiving further knowledge. Knowledge, as we know from the whole of Scripture, is an ever-increasing, never fully

obtainable piece of the puzzle that HAS TO BE active if it is to be real. For if we obtain all knowledge of all things, then there is no more to be learned and there is nothing more to receive. Thus, if knowledge is not progressive, then we are given all things immediately upon the seal of the Holy Spirit. And as most of us will recall our initial days after believing in Christ, the things we've learned SINCE THAT TIME have been tremendous. Who among us is intellectually or experientially the same as they were the day they first believed in the grace of Christ?

But staying with the line of "what is God doing today," we must remember that NO knowledge is of ourselves. We cannot and do not have the capacity to find knowledge on our own.

"And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." I Corinthians 8:2

"For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" I Corinthians 4:7

Though knowledge is that which men thirst after, it is not obtained by them on their own. Men seek it, but they only find it when God opens their eyes to see it. That's the amazing reality of His Word. That's the amazing reason why you can look at a passage over and over for years, think you've got it down pat without question, and then suddenly see something that you never saw before. Was it YOU who suddenly saw it on your own? Or was it God who opened your eyes to see it?

The Word of God is full of incredible depth, insight, and wisdom beyond our basic comprehension. To the everyday man of the world, what would they see in opening the Bible except a lot of words and a bunch of stories? What insights would they see if Christ is not in them? What knowledge would they obtain if the Spirit has not given it? None.

The Spirit of knowledge is something that LIVES. It is not a gift that was given and we have to constantly figure it all out on our own. It LIVES inside of us. We find knowledge because He keeps providing it!

4. Today, God is working His mighty power toward those who believe.

"And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" Ephesians 1:19

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;" Ephesians 3:14-16

The Fifth Spirit. The Spirit of Might.

This one can be extremely difficult to address because of the connotation that "might" often exhibits. We think of "might" and then we think of being able to "move mountains" or "lift big things." We think of all the "mighty" things that are visible. But what of the Spirit of Might?

When Isaiah spoke of this 5th Spirit, the word he used in Hebrew was *geburah*, which means "valor or victory." Have you ever seen the images of men (or women, if you count Joan of Arc) who receive knighthood? The concept of being "knighted" is a position of valor (Courage and boldness). When one receives this knighthood, they are receiving an internal gift for bravery. But what's interesting is that upon being knighted, they rise up. And when they rise up, they are not as they were when they knelt.

So what exactly does the Spirit of Might do? Well, let's look at the same words for "mighty" and "power" as used in Paul's letter to the Ephesians here in verse 19.

Mighty (*kratos*) = Vigor

Power (*ischus*) = Ability, Forcefulness, Strength

Have you ever considered the concept of someone having "vigor?" Let's look at it for a moment...

Vigor is defined as four things:

1. Physical or mental strength, energy, or force.
2. The capacity for natural growth and survival, as of plants or animals.
3. Strong feeling; enthusiasm or intensity.
4. Legal effectiveness or validity.

If we simplify those four items, we could insert a larger understanding of what it means to have ANY spirit of might (even if its not from the Holy Spirit). For to have a spirit of might (or vigor), one would have an "enthusiastic, intense mental strength and capacity for natural growth and survival." How does one obtain this mental strength? Is it automatic? Is it immediate? Who among us would suggest that vigor is something you're born with?

You have to be INSPIRED toward such a nature. Growth is natural, but to do so with vigor is UNnatural. It requires an external source often described simply as "spirit." For when someone has "spirit," we often understand that they have "enthusiasm for life."

The "Spirit of Might" that God instills today within us is a LIVING Spirit that we can and must utilize because it is available. Not everyone uses the things that are at their disposal. My wife and I have had a little espresso machine sitting on our counter for almost a year and neither of us have used it. We HAVE it. But we don't USE it. Such is the Spirit of Might that the Paul prays for his audience to understand. The access to enthusiasm. The access to mental strength.

5. Today, God still gives us access to the Father through the Spirit.

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Ephesians 2:18

"In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." Ephesians 3:12

It's like having an unending ticket to the most knowledgeable person available. The world wants answers. The world, if they knew or understood, would go to this person if they knew that EVERY question they ever wanted to ask could be answered. It would be a swarm of people. Like a chaotic concert of fans just trying to touch the one they came to see.

Our ticket to the Father is through the Holy Spirit. And it's our freedom to pray. It's our freedom to speak plainly with Him. For when we speak to the Father, we speak through the Spirit, not of our own volition.

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Romans 8:26

Communication with the Father is not something we do on our own. For if we did, then God would not be God. Let us not forget that God required a veil to shield His view from the public in the Holy of Holies. God's appearance and character has not changed in this manner, so it is with great humility that we MUST recognize our ONLY access to the Father is not of our own unique righteousness or of our own unique prayer life... it is an access given us through the Holy Spirit EACH time we pray. For our prayers, if spoken on our own and not given through the Spirit, are as dust and rubble.

6. Today, God is building a habitation within the Body through the Spirit.

"In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Ephesians 2:22

Hopefully you're noticing a theme here. Each time something is HAPPENING, it is HAPPENING because of a living Holy Spirit.

Are we, as a Body, presently united? Not at all. So envisioning this aspect of God's doing isn't all that challenging. He has not left His Body flailing in the wind to their own destruction. He IS building us together as a habitation for Himself.

7. Today, God is opening eyes to the understanding of His love.

"May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:18-19

Most men who thirst after knowledge only do so for their own vanity of mind. And as such, the result of their knowledge (which isn't theirs to begin with) leads to a failure to continue toward that which surpasses knowledge.

The "love of Christ" is known as Agape Love. Often, it is referred to as affectionate, benevolent, or charitable love. In other words, this type of love is an INCLINATION to perform kind or generous acts.

Many are intensely knowledgeable. Many have obtained knowledge far greater than our own. But many just can't move into the next stage (level) above knowledge because, for some odd reason, they

believe that knowledge is where all things derive. Yet, until this agape love is understood and applied, there is no furthering of their perfection and sanctification in Christ Jesus.

These are seven things that God is doing today. As I begin to look at the clock, time has slipped by ever so quickly and "seven" seems like a good number to stop at for the evening. Let me sum up by repeating the first seven things that God is doing today and conclude by comparing these things to the perspectives of modern Christendom.

The (first) Seven Things that God is doing today:

1. Today, God is providing peace to those who who are in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 1:2)
2. Today, God is providing His Spirit of wisdom. (Ephesians 1:15-17)
3. Today, God is providing knowledge through the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:17)
4. Today, God is working His mighty power toward those who believe. (Ephesians 1:19)
5. Today, God is giving us access to the Father through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:18)
6. Today, God is building a habitation within the Body through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:22)
7. Today, God is opening eyes to the understanding of His love. (Ephesians 3:18-19)

Believe it or not, we've only scratched the surface of what God is doing. And we've only scratched three chapters. Even more unbelievable is that I could have pulled out many more things that God has DONE through the same 3 chapters. But what we're trying to get into is what He is DOING today.

One thing I want you to notice about the above seven things is their commonality. They all involve God's giving a part of Himself. Be it peace, be it knowledge, be it wisdom, be it power... He is giving of Himself for our benefit and life in Him.

What we often and tragically find within modern Christendom and church cultures is a very different perspective of what God is doing. The following seven things aren't that far of a stretch for people to say:

1. Today, God is moving in our school.
2. Today, God is changing hearts in our church.
3. Today, God is giving me direction on which school to attend.
4. Today, God is telling me who I will marry.
5. Today, God is helping me to make a difference.
6. Today, God is teaching me about His love.

7. Today, God is working in the lives of His children.

All of these things, when spoken of lightly, MIGHT have some significance, but they fearfully lead us into a world where we claim the signature of God on very personal aspects of life as though ANYthing that we believe must be from Him is from Him. So rather than speaking of God's work today in terms of a larger Body, we speak of it personally and collectively (in terms of our immediate church family or community). This is an error of traditional manners. We have been trained and taught in our Christian culture to believe that all good things that happen to us personally are blessings from God and therefore, we can put His signature on all things personally good. We then come to these odd extremes where it is believed He speaks to us directly about what we should wear that day, whether or not we should speak to this person or that person, which job we should accept, or how quickly we should tie our shoes.

The working of God is so amazing and incredible and it IS alive within this world today, but it ought not be spoken of carelessly or naively as though He is caught up on the vanity of life. God is not a God of confusion or of vane perception. He has orchestrated an awesome story from before the beginning of time and He is orchestrating the same awesome story today at this very moment.

If you'd like me to continue sharing from the Scriptures on this matter, please let me know and I'll be happy to do so over the Christmas holiday. Just sitting down to write this tonight has been an wonderful journey into the mind of Christ, the pathways of peace, and the worthy walk of life. I end tonight with the end of Ephesians 3 where Paul offers the most insightful answer to your question...

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21

May you be encouraged from what has been shared and expressed thus far.