

“Open The Eyes Of Our Hearts Lord”

In Acts 6, the leaders in the early church did a wise thing – they delegated the care of the congregation to seven men who had good reputations as well as being full of the Spirit and wisdom. We call them deacons. They did this in order to free up the apostles to concentrate on two primary functions – the teaching of the Word and prayer. So, the basic responsibility of an elder is to see that the Word of God is taught accurately and to pray. But pray about what? Ephesians 1:15-18 helps us.

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. These blessings are enumerated in vv. 3-14...underline them. The Paul says, “For this reason.” In light of all these blessings that God has provided, he asks that God would also provide wisdom and revelation so they would know Christ intimately. When God grants wisdom and revelation He opens “the eyes of our heart,” so we can see with our heart what we could never see with our natural eyes. Have you ever seen a random dot autostereogram? A Magic Eye poster is a picture embedded within a picture. You don’t see the picture at first and then, boom, there it is. Paul prays that God would open the eyes of their hearts so they could clearly see can three supernatural realities - divine purpose, divine people, and divine power. God’s purpose must be pursued, His people must be possessed and a His power must be put to work.

Pray that we would realize the hope for which He has called us. What exactly is God’s divine purpose? What is the hope he is referring to? He tells us in Eph. 1:9-10. “God’s secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ -- everything in heaven and on earth.” (NLT)

Ever feel like things are falling apart? That’s because they are. In Genesis 3 the things God joined together begin to pull apart and everything God separated gets joined together. This wacked, cracked, busted and broken world will be put back together by the one who created it. And He has called us to participate in the reconciliation project bringing accord out of discord and integrating what has disintegrated. “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” 2 Cor. 5:16-18

2. Pray that we would realize the riches of His inheritance in us. In 1:14 we discovered that the Holy Spirit is the down payment of OUR inheritance but verse 18 refers to “the riches of the glory of *HIS* inheritance in the saints.” **We are blessed to be His possession.** God has always viewed His people that way.

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Exodus 19:5-6,

“But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession.” Deuteronomy 4:20

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” Deuteronomy 7:6.

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

Eldership is a stewardship of the highest order. Elders are called to protect God’s property and we are His property. In his moving speech to the elders from Ephesus, Paul says, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.” Acts 20:28-30

People in this church are His possession, bought and paid for! “You are not your own, you are bought with a price.” Unless “the eyes of our hearts are enlightened” we will adopt the same human viewpoint of those around us and fail to see the true nature and purpose of the church. We are the hope of the world. Kings and kingdoms, politicians and political parties, social services agencies can accomplish nothing of eternal worth. People will get all twisted up about the next election but let’s keep it all in perspective. The value of one simple soul spending an eternity in God’s house is infinitely greater than one persuasive politician spending a few years in the White House.

3. Pray that we would realize the power available to us. We can accomplish God's will if we know "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us." (v. 19) *"When God's people plead with Him in prayer, God in His grace often moves in power."* The power of God is what assures us that His plan will be fulfilled. This power is demonstrated in His resurrection...v. 19b. This power is beyond human comprehension and requires divine illumination to grasp. The only power we know about is human power. We think of large armies and powerful weapons. But the power of God is so different that it can be easily missed without God's revelation. For example, the average Jew living in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion would have had to conclude that Jesus was a failure. He had very few followers, led no revolt against Rome, was impotent against the powers of his day, and he paid for his boldness with his life. He failed. But we know "the rest of the story."

During the three-day period when the body of Jesus lay lifeless in the tomb, God's power was quietly at work. Behind a rock that sealed the tomb, far beyond public notice, something amazing happened - a dead man came to life. It seems that this is God's standard operating procedure. He occasionally parts seas and turns water into wine but more often His power is at work quietly behind closed doors, whether it's a rock that seals a tomb or the front door of a little frame house where a tiny five-foot grandmother prays quietly. That little lady possesses more power than a raging dictator proudly announcing his latest threat to the world. Remember the story of the unjust judge and the persistent widow in Lk. 18. Who has the most power? Typical of a story Jesus would tell. It surprises and sounds exactly the opposite of what we would expect.

Country singer Randy Travis captured this thought in his song called, "When Mama Prayed." *When mama prayed, good things happened. When mama prayed, lives were changed. Not much more than five foot tall, but mountains big and small crumbled all away, When mama prayed.*

The same resurrection power which transformed the disciples from a frightened, discouraged, defeated band of men to a dynamic, confident force which turned the world upside down is available to us. God is working out His plan and He has invited us to take part in it. He offers His power, which is different from any earthly power, to do battle with the powers of darkness and prevail. John Piper reminds us that we should have a wartime mentality about prayer.

"Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for

more comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world. Prayer gives us the significance of frontline forces and gives God the glory of a limitless Provider. The one who gives the power gets the glory...Prayer is the communication with headquarters by which the weapons of warfare are deployed according to the will of God.”

So, pray this prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23. Keep it handy. Pray it for yourself, pray it for those you love, pray it for your church and for those who lead this church.

Call for the elders to come to the stage...

“And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Acts 14:23

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.” Titus 1:5

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” Acts 20:17

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” 1 Pe. 5:1-4

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” 1 Tim. 5:17

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” Heb. 13:7

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EPHESIANS 1:9-10 (NLT)

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